

TAGORE

—A *Study*

BY

DHURJATI PRASAD MUKERJI



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To

SREE SATYENDRA NATH BOSE

PROFESSOR OF PHYSICS

DACCA UNIVERSITY

A Recent Book by the Author
MODERN INDIAN CULTURE.
-A Sociological Study

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PREFACE

THIS synoptic review was primarily undertaken at the request of the enterprising Padma Publications Ltd., of Bombay. The deeper urge came from certain convictions about the nature of Tagore's greatness which the reader will find in the second chapter.

The list of authors to whom I am indebted is large indeed. Tagore is the indispensable and the surest guide to himself. Where, as in his letters, there are contradictions, I would like to trace them as much to the inevitable uncertainties of personal crises as to his never-failing kindness to numerous enquirers, to that large obedience to patience and suffering which characterised his conduct. If goodness is not afraid of commitments, greatness also contains antitheses.

Next to him, I am indebted to Srijut Amal Home and Prabhat Kumar Mukerji. Home's Chronicle of eighty years in the Tagore Memorial Special Supplement Number of the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, September 13, 1941, is a brilliant combination of scholarship and journalism. Prabhat Babu's two volumes (in Bengali) on Tagore's life and works form the authoritative biography,

while his shorter survey (in English) in the Tagore Birthday Number of the *Viswabharati Quarterly*, 1941 is the best brief account of Tagore's life written so far. I have leaned heavily on them all.

Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray's '*Rabindra Sahityer Bhumika*' (in Bengali—a Calcutta University publication) I have found useful. It is full and sensible. Its strength is in the sociological point of view. Ajit K. Chakravarty, Charu Bandopadhyaya, S. K. Bannerji, Abdnl Odud, Annada Shankar Roy, Mohit Majumdar, Biswapati Chowdhury, Pramatha Bisi, Subodh Sen Gupta and S. N. Das Gupta's standard writings (in Bengali) have thrown light on various problems. I have not always agreed with them.

For special aspects, like painting, music, prosody, politics, etc., I have gone to the specialists. Their names will encumber this volume. I have utilised the files of several magazines, like the *Modern Review* and *Prabashi*, *Parichaya*, *Kabita*, *Vichitra*, *Uttara*, and *Viswabharati Quarterly*, as also the special birthday numbers and volumes of greetings, like the *Golden Book*, the *Jayanti Utsarga* and *Kabi Prasasti*. The literature on Tagore is spread all over the dailies and monthlies, quarterlies and annuals. I have picked and chosen from them. Non-Indian biographers and critics have been stimulating.

But my views are my own. If they are wrong, they would not diminish Tagore's greatness; if they are right, let some readers of this book start reading Bengali to know why and how he was great. The days of meaningless adulation and patronising tolerance are over. He

has to be reckoned with by the future generation. Estimates may veer, but his place is permanent in the tortuous course of culture.

I crave the pardon of all students of Rabindranath for what is missing in this volume. My particular regret is for the absence of a fuller mention of his remarkable essays and letters and his practical work, each of which certainly deserved a chapter. All that I can say is that the omissions are not intentional.

I am particularly grateful to Sree Asit Kumar Gupta for his many helpful suggestions.

Lucknow

DHURJATI PRASAD MUKERJI

28th June, 1943



PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

A FEW personal remarks may not be out of place in the preface to the second edition of 'Tagore.' I have been grateful for the kind reception which has been accorded to the first edition. I have also profited from the criticisms, most of which were reasonable and legitimate. But on two points, I think, I could plead for exoneration. The book had to be hurried through the press in just a week's time and there was no time for checking up. I am afraid that the same difficulty has overtaken the second edition. To give one example, the English dates of publications

have not been corrected in the light of recent research. They were mostly taken from the 1941 Tagore numbers of the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* and the *Vishwabharati Quarterly*, and perforce, the dates have had to remain unchanged, probably, it is hoped, without any great jeopardy to the due appreciation of Tagore's greatness. The same remark also applies to the English rendering of certain titles of Tagore's works.

This book, be it clearly noted, is not an academic thesis on Tagore. It only aims at conveying a synoptic view of Tagore's manifold activities. Each chapter could be expanded into a volume. But it is humbly submitted that a small book attempting, however poorly, to envisage the wholeness of Tagore has also a place in the literature on Tagore. Besides, literature is no more than a private vice of mine, and I can only feel grateful if a few find a trace of public virtue in it.

The criticism on the score of levity should have been ignored. Yet, the passage containing the reference to Tagore's love for mangoes and Sanatogen has been deleted, if only as a concession to the 'religiosity' of some Indian readers. How often is veneration a cloak for vested interests!

In any case, an early second edition is one more proof of the modern man's perennial interest in Rabindranath.

Lucknow,
22nd September, 1944. DHURJATI PRASAD MUKERJI.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

HOMAGE to the great is a never-ending ritual. It is intimate with the needs of the age and the immediacies of the hour. The homage varies from toleration when the people's spiritual vigilance is low to revaluation under the stress of crises. At no moment, however, does the acceptance of greatness go out of the collective memory of man. Curious too are the forms of allegiance ; adulation to-day and hostility to-morrow, but indifference rarely, unless the people have mortgaged their soul to the powers of darkness. Even then, the lapse is temporary ; when the deed is redeemed, there is celebration at home once more. So long as the supreme values are not finally abandoned by the people, no dishonour is meant by fresh attempts at appraisals. It is this final consideration which should apologise for any discrepancy between the present

uncritical opinion about Tagore and the estimate of his greatness suggested here. Tagore was a product of his time and his environment ; he sought to refashion them in the light of his understanding ; and the interaction was a valuable strand in the culture-process of modern India. That process has been recently further conditioned by world-shaking events, though its own contribution to the shaping thereof has not been commensurate with its potentialities. It is this changing context which is the proper background for the study of Tagore to-day. Nobody can tell what is going to happen to the world and India. The peace that will follow may or may not be the peace that Tagore desired. Human nature may or may not change, exploitation may or may not cease. In case, peace, love and harmony lose their ancient urges, Tagore will be discarded like an old cloak. If they are retained, Tagore remains in the grand tradition of those who speak on behalf of humanity in the midst of its engulfment by barbarism.

Tagore's life has little or no 'drama.' No absorbing passion but in his own creation, no cycles of boom, crash and depression in private fortune, no greater struggle against odds than the usual one against the philistinism of illiterate litterateurs and semi-literate worshippers, broke up the steady tenor of his living. The Nobel Laureateship was not an unexpected phenomenon, nor was the conferment by the Oxford University of the Doctorate in Literature, *Honoris Causa*, at a special convocation in Shantiniketan. Tagore had many bereavements and private and public disappointments, but they did not

stigmatise his work, barring one volume, the *Smaran*, which was occasioned by the death of his wife. On the contrary, he almost always succeeded in converting them into materials for a deeper apprehension of the spirit and for nobler expressions of the joy which, in his view, pervaded the universe. And this is not surprising either for one whose *mantram* was *Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam*. The philosophy of the Upanishads does not help one to run a life on the lines of a movietone hero. It disables 'character,' evens out the sharpness of the incidence of events, and may prevent one from being a 'pure' patriot. It can only make for the belief in Universal Harmony. Of such stuff 'dramas' are not made. No sense of destiny hangs over Tagore's life; and therefore, Tagore's life-history is mainly the biography of ideas and artistic creations just as his own dramas are more idylls of the Quest than stories of human conflict. In other words, Tagore's crises are all subjective, begotten by the spirit, even if nursed by the objective situation. That jealous guard over his soul completely defeats Western biographers and baffles any Indian writer of this century who has accepted their model. In another language, the life of Tagore cannot be composed on the symphonic pattern of Goethe's, whose variety of creative work most resembled his. Tagore's life-pattern was essentially melodic, with numerous improvisations indeed, but it was built round the regiant notes. This does not at all mean that he did not share in the tragedies of his country and the world. That he did, but his reactions remained essentially personal, spiritual.

Ganges, fertile, populous, alive and quick by their very uncertainty, detached, self-sufficient, contacting the main body as by an effort of will and retreating shyly into their own world at the slightest shake. This double assurance of freedom became treble with the young Rabindranath who was the fourteenth child of his parents none of whom established any personal intimacy with him. And yet, the Maharshi had the most abiding influence over his son. Rabindranath's Upanishadic base was fixed by the father.

When the child of such a family was sent to school, first the Oriental Seminary and then the Bengal Academy, he could not but be unhappy. The curriculum was not much better than what it is to-day. At home, he was subjected to a very rigorous discipline that did good to his body and mind. The school, in fact, offered a chance for playing the truant. Rabindranath was soon given the sacred thread and taken away by his father to Shantiniketan, a beautiful spot with the requisite tree and the adequate myth, which had been purchased by the Maharshi in 1863 for the quietude of its open spaces. Throughout his life Shantiniketan remained Tagore's psychic capital. He gave it the human touch and in return got back its openness. A north India tour was undertaken in the same year, 1873, and a visit paid to the Golden Temple at Amritsar on the way to the hill station of Dalhousie. The father always found time to instruct the son in Sanskrit, English, and Astronomy, a subject of which he remained fond throughout his life. On coming back he was admitted to the St. Xavier's

School, Calcutta, and received private lessons from tutors. Shantiniketan made him write *Prithviraj Parajaya* (the defeat of Prithviraj), while the St. Xavier's School was probably responsible for his incomplete translation of *Macbeth*. He lost his mother in 1875, a dear body who remained oblivious of her son's existence in the midst of her pre-occupations. She once called Rabindranath her 'dark' boy. No trace of her direct influence is to be found in Tagore's works. If the psycho-analysts may hold this negative fact responsible for the absence in Tagore of the conventional type of appreciation of the motherland, a sociologist may explain it in terms of the peculiar social and religious traditions of the family. When, however, we remember the hold of the Tantrik cult of the Divine Mother in Bengal, its connection with the first nationalist movement, and its influence on the *Shyama* cycle of songs, Tagore's dis-association from one valuable strand of Bengal's cultural traditions cannot be ignored and the lack of personal touch with his mother but be noted. Tagore's lines on motherhood and motherly love are very few ; he was not particularly proud of the national songs in which Bengal is addressed as the Mother ; he was not even fond of the famous *Bande Mataram* ; and he had a supreme contempt for the mother's babies, (*vide* the last story he wrote—*The Laboratory*). These are facts that await further analysis.

The Hindu Mela, which was the nucleus of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, twice excited the young boy of 14 to write patriotic poems. The last one showed which way the wind was blowing. Lord Lytton was holding the

Delhi Durbar, and famine was stalking the land. Rabindranath saw through the irony of the situation and exposed it in a poem which he recited before the audience. Poverty in the midst of plenty struck him deeply. But the forum of the journal *Bharati*, with the eldest brother, Dwijendranath, as the editor, offered his talents a greater scope. There, as 'Bhanu Sinha Thakur,' he published several poems on the model of the Vaishnava lyrics, besides contributing literary and sociological essays, a long story, parts of a novel, and a long poem, *Kabi-Kahini*, the next of its kind after *Banaphul*, in eight cantos, that had been written and published elsewhere a year earlier. Young Rabindranath was budding. Among the poetical works of his sixteenth year, only the 'Bhanu Sinha' poems bear the hall-mark. They are clever adaptation of the sensuous spirit, imagery, rhythm and language of *Vidyapati*. Artifice called unto artifice, but young Rabindranath's conceits were counterfeit. He lacked the religious feeling of the *pada kartas* and made amends for it by adolescent adroitness. Yet, these poems were maturer than the *Kabi-kahini* in which he was unfolding the life of a poet into the dreamy vagueness of 'Universal Love.' The earliest noticeable literary influence on Tagore's poetry was that of the Vaishnava lyricists. His essays, however, were of another stuff. It is still a pleasure to read the comments of this young man of sixteen on English manners, English literature, Beatrice and Dante. They are less soft than his poems and do not exactly suggest a poet's prose. This latent dichotomy between Rabindranath's critical attitude and style,

on the one hand, and the approach of personal appreciation in the style of poetic prose, on the other, was to become patent later on, till a high degree of decency and tolerance from an unrivalled position at the apex submerged it. In fact, this subsequent charity was often a loss to critical literature.

The year 1878 found Tagore a wanderer. He stayed for a while with his second brother, Mr. S. N. Tagore, the first Indian I.C.S., then posted at Ahmedabad, and sailed with him for England. Beyond attending a few lectures of Prof. Henry Morley, (who was struck by the young Indian's essay on Shelley), a few plays, concerts and meetings, he did not seem to have profited much in the way of academic discipline. But he found time to contribute to the *Bharati* a brilliant series of letters on his sojourn in Europe, and to begin a drama in verse, called the *Bhagna-hridaya* (The Broken Heart). The latter is a purely adolescent outpouring, and the poet's own criticism of it in his '*Jiban-Smriti*' (Reminiscences) is a measure of his self-knowledge. But the letters are already literature; the prose is sure, lucid, fluid, the mind is critical, observations are sound, and comments to the point. Very little of that metaphysical burden which certain later travel-diaries *a la* Kayserling carried is to be found in these letters. Young Tagore did not like England and came back after a year and half's stay, unfit and unequipped for any job. Tagore was seldom happy in the man-scape of Bengal, but he was never happy outside her landscape, and womanscape too. The climate and the

closed view of England left him as cold as Gladstone's speeches did.

The formative period now began in full earnest. *Balmiki Prativa* was staged, Rabindranath taking the part of the poet and flashing a new facet of his genius. He protested against the opium trade in China and called it 'the traffic in China's death.' At the Medical College Hall, he spoke on '*Music and Feeling*,' a subject that was to remain ever close to his heart. His vocal demonstration caused a sensation. For many long years to come, any audience, literary, private or political, would demand songs, songs and songs from him. The voice had a high pitch and an enormous range. Rhythm was not perfect, but the mould was classic. Expression was always his strong point. Rabindranath at this time decided to leave for England to join the Bar. He only went as far as Madras, and came to Mussourie instead. A very interesting family trait is this of sudden departures and quicker returns. But the Maharshi was a greater adept at it than the Poet ; while the latter would come back from half the distance or from the railway station, the former sometimes would not go beyond the gate and keep the luggage ready for the next unknown and unknowable destination. From Mussourie Rabindranath hurried back to Chander-nagore to stay with his third brother, Jyotirindranath, whom he probably loved the most. *Sandhya-Sangeet* (Evening Songs) was written when the poet was only 20. It was the occasion for Bankim Chandra's compliment. The welcome-garland meant for Bankim Chandra by Romesh Dutt on the occasion of his daughter's marriage

was placed by Bankim Chandra on the neck of the younger writer, an incident which the Poet was never tired of repeating. On that day the *Sandhya-Sangeet* (Evening Songs) had appeared and a copy had reached Bankim. The next year saw Tagore finishing a novel, *Bau Thakuraincr hat* (The Young Queen's Market), and publishing another musical drama, the *Kal Mrigaya*. (The Fatal Hunt). During his stay at Sudder Street, Calcutta, he had the Vision which he was to describe in prose and verse, in the *Awakening of the Fountain* (in the *Prabhat Sangeet*—Morning Songs), in his "Reminiscences" and in the "Religion of Man." With another trip to the Bombay Presidency, another drama *Prakritir Parisodh* (Nature's Revenge), a number of songs, marriage, and the death of his sister-in-law, Jyotirindranath's wife, the first chapter of this period is closed.

Rabindranath was arriving. The *Sandhya-Sangeet* registered a step ahead of imitation in prosody and expression, and its joy in that freedom was a sufficient compensation for the aimless rambling in the *Forest of the Heart*. Similarly, in the musical drama of the *Balmiki Prativa*, the young writer made bold to introduce certain Western airs and cadences in response to the demand for action. The *Prabhat Sangeet* was the fruit of that all-round urge for freedom. Its second poem, the *Awakening of the Fountain*, was only the first nodal point in the poet's development. The poet, it seems, did not catch the full significance of the crisis. For many long years to come, until he could equate his illumination to the Upanishadic universal of Joy, the vision would remain blurred and

the voice an Echo. The subjective unfolding, in the meantime, was a great gain, and the young man's pre-occupation was with the surplus experience of a felt-whole. Truth had dawned on the half-awakening mind, and the poetry that followed was one of dream-mutterings, and the private symbols which were thrown up were unsure guides to systematic thought.

Prakritir Parisodh was the first important drama of Tagore. Its music was subordinate to the story, and the story held better than in the two earlier pieces. The conflict between asceticism and natural humanity, a key to Tagore's philosophy, came out well in the defeat of the Sannyasi at the instance of the girl whom he had brought up. From another angle, as Tagore described it later in his "Reminiscences," the drama was an attempt to bridge the gulf between the finite and the infinite, between the dull daily worthlessness of unconscious living and the deliberate rigour of a living upto an external standard, with the help of love and richer personal relationship. But death had severed one of his dearest bonds and the young poet was benumbed for the time. From now he would struggle poetically, conceptually, spiritually, to put its fear in the proper place. His emergence out of the dark night of the soul was described in *Kari O Kamal* (Sharps and Flats), the next significant book of poems. Gone were the exciting days of effervescence in which *Chhabi O Gan* (Pictures and Songs) was written. The poet would not die but would live in this beautiful world, this forum of men. So came the variety of subjects in this slim volume. *Sharps and Flats*, all singing the world of senses as it

(Mistake at the Start). Here was a social skit, well constructed and with coruscating dialogue. Two articles, *Woman Labour* and *The Unemployed*, written about the same time, are additional proofs of his gifts for concrete thinking.

His second trip to Europe was also recorded in a brilliant diary. Tagore turned definitely to stories and journalism. *The Post-Master*, on which so much of Tagore's reputation in this line rests, was contributed to a Bengali weekly. But the monthly magazine *Sadhana* soon appeared under his own editorship. Education and politics, among others, now engaged his attention. The article, *The Tortuosities of Education*, was published in *Sadhana* in 1892. Its arguments on behalf of education in the mother-tongue have not yet been improved upon. It contained the germs of Tagore's pedagogics and should be read by all Indian Educationists. Tagore, meanwhile, was composing the poems of *Sonar Tari* (Golden Boat).

From the point of view of evolution *Chitrangada* (1892) was a dead end. He never produced more richly sensuous poetry before or after. No translation can give an idea of its extravagance of images and metaphors, its plenitude of lyric sentiments and its rich melodic pattern. But the body-soul conflict was there, and it was resolved on behalf of the soul. Whatever treatment of the man-woman relation we would find in subsequent poems, novels and stories, took its start from the sacrifice of Chitrangada at the altar of her idea of what a lover, Arjuna, should be.

The *Sonar Tari* poems were a different affair. They

were in a way a new development. A sense of mystery pervaded all these poems, and a dim figure stepped out of the psyche's penumbra. The first collections of short stories and of songs were also published in 1892. They will be treated separately.

The next phase of Tagore may be called the nationalist one. His articles on politics were of course not political in the strict sense of the term. They were essentially sociological, because he never separated politics from society. Two articles of this period which need special mention, *Ingraj O Bharatbashi* (The Englishman and Indians) and *Ingrajer Atanka* (The Englishman's Fear), betray an intuitive grasp of the essence of Indo-British politics. In the latter, Tagore stressed the need of Hindu-Muslim unity which he described as the haunting fear of the Englishman. Tagore read at this time a path-finding paper on folk-songs and nursery rhymes, and showed their basic importance for national, i.e., popular literature. He also opened a Swadeshi shop in Calcutta, and a jute-press in his zamindari to relieve the jute-growers among his tenants. Obviously, it was a period of search for balance and objectivity in the outer world of his country. Tagore's theoretical and practical contributions to nationalism were constructive. Even the first essays were marked by charity and knowledge and grounded upon the dignity of self-help. He was unsparing in his criticism of foreign rule and domestic slavery. In spite of his being ahead of the times, we must not expect too much of a young man in his thirties. He had not yet realised the limitations of nationalism nor had he yet sensed the contradictions

between the British rule and the full flowering of Indian culture. But, assuredly, he was already convinced that the national movement should not be a begging expedition. In 1897, he attended the Bengal Provincial Conference at Natore and moved, unsuccessfully, for the conduct of the proceedings in the mother-tongue. Next year, the Sedition Act was passed, and Tagore read a paper, *The Kantha-rodh* (The Throttled), before a huge meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall. When Tilak was arrested (1898), his protesting voice was the sharpest. He went about collecting funds for Tilak's defence. Plague broke out in Calcutta, and Tagore duly warned the Government against the repetition of the Bombay measures. He became the right hand man of Sister Nivedita in organising voluntary relief. In the political conference at Dacca he again vainly pleaded for the mother-tongue, and in a vicious speech severely criticised the Zamindars for their indifference and reactionary attitude. The opening year of the century saw him safely installed with his family at Shantiniketan, away from the dust and din of politics and economics. His business had failed, involving him in a large debt, and he was eager to give a concrete expression to his views of national reconstruction through group-activity.

It would be wrong to think, however, that his nationalistic phase was artistically uncreative. Between 1894 and 1901 were composed, among others, *Pancha Bhuter Diary* (The Diary of Five Elements—Dialogues), *Kshudita Pashan* (Hungry Stones—Story), the poems of *Chitra* and *Chaitali* (The Last Harvest), *Jiban Debata* (Poems),

Malini (a musical drama), *Baikunther Khata* (Mss. of Baikuntha—a Social Comedy), dramatic poems like *Gandharir Abedan* (Gandhari's Appeal), *Sati* and *Narak-bas* (Sojourn in Hell), *Kanika* (Epigrams), *Katha* (Balads), *Kshanika* (light lyrics), *Lakshmir Pariksha* (The Test of Luxmi—Verse-Drama) and *Chirakumar Sabha*, (The Bachelor's Club—a Comedy). Anyone of these would make a first-class reputation, but *The Diary of Five Elements*, *The Hungry Stones* are incomparable pieces. The dialogues in the Diary and the comedies are witty and sparkling, showing in letters, what his friends knew in talks, an intellectual alertness of a high order. The Bengali stage still considers the two comedies as first-class box-office attractions. But their performance demands highly finished acting. There is hardly any group of young actors in Bengal's colleges who have not tried their talents on these two comedies. The charge that Tagore's dramas and dialogues are all too mystical, too intellectual, is just not true. He had also a good command over the situational humour. But, certainly, he was more at home in witty repartees. It is a pity that the non-Bengalis have been denied this supreme pleasure and fed with his mystic dramas alone. He only half knows Tagore who has not listened to his talk. Tagore wrote *Bachelor's Club* in two days in response to the demand of Sarala Debi, his niece, who was then editing *Bharati*. *The Diary of the Five Elements* was inspired by the conversation of a few intellectuals who had gathered round Tagore to discuss life and letters. *The Five Elements* were the five points of view, of the philosophy of life. This little volume should

be one of the world's classics. Even Tagore could not excel its brilliance and wisdom. The story of *Hungry Stones* was occasioned by a weird experience at Sahi Bag which had been the residence of his civilian brother at Ahmedabad. Tagore was a past-master at conjuring up the spirit of a place.

Once at Shantiniketan, his tests began. What with the new school, then known as Brahmacharyasram, the *Bangadarshan*, Bankim Chandra's magazine newly revived, the failure of the business, and his daughter's illness and wife's death, his time was fully occupied. Tagore was a devoted husband and father, and a most patient nurse. To meet his obligations he had to sell a portion of his property. Rabindranath lived with the students as one of them, taught them in the school-hours, and shared in all their activities. Rabindranath's wife had given her ornaments and her whole time to the Shantiniketan. Her loss was commemorated in *Smaran* (In Memoriam). The youngest son, Shamindra, was taken up by Rabindranath with all the affection of a mother. For him were written the *Sisu* (The Child) poems which are masterpieces of child literature. The translations of some of these poems later appeared in the *Crescent Moon*. But Rabindranath was not the man to give up writing for other duties. For him, as with very few, writing, composition of songs, all forms of creative work were an exercise in balance. The two novels, *Chokher Bali* (Grit in the Eye) and *Nauka Dubi* (The Wreck), were published serially in *Bangadarshan*. In poetry, *Naibedya* (Offerings) came out with its peace and wisdom (1901).. At

about this time Professor Mohit Sen of Shantiniketan, a sweet and sacrificing soul, began to edit in nine volumes *The Collective works of Tagore*. It was the second collected edition, when the poet was forty-three, the first being undertaken by Satyaprasad Ganguly, his nephew and intimate in 1896-97, when the poet was thirty-five only.

The period covering the poem *Jiban Debata* (1896) and the book *Naibedya* (1901) marked an important stage in Tagore's personal development. Much has been written on the concept of *Jiban Debata*. It has been identified with the Socratic daemon, the Ego, a Personal God, and what not. Tagore himself added to the confusion by trying to define it differently for different temperaments. True that the concept also engaged his poetry for a considerable time. In reality, however, it was an attempt at moving away from his engrossing subjectivity to something which was at once concrete and universal. The concreteness was sought in *Jiban Debata* and the universality in the Infinite. Tagore resolved the conflict when he was convinced that the Infinite became defined in humanity and that humanity was ever in search of the Infinite. The first aspect was treated in the *Jiban Debata* poems, and there were many of them, and the second in *Naibedya*, the key-note of which was prayerful quest. One feels, however, that the value of the *Jiban Debata* series has been exaggerated while that of *Naibedya* under-estimated by our critics. *Naibedya* had an assurance that was derived simultaneously from its author's acceptance of the best in Indian philosophy and the confidence in his ability to amend it in the light of his own experience. It

was this double certainty that gave him the courage to discard the philosophy of asceticism and embrace the fulness of life. The fulness included the potentiality of his country; hence, *Naibedya* contained some of the noblest imaginings of India's future. Tagore's spirituality was gaining in content in the same proportion as it was losing its vapour. *Naibedya's* diction alone should prove it; here every word was married to the deed. (The novels will be separately considered.)

Spirituality or no spirituality, Tagore was still restless at Shantiniketan. It could not be due to his bereavements which he knew how to transmute; nor was it due to the influence of Rev. Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, another restless soul who had moved to Shantiniketan and was now drifting away from it into the whirlpool of terrorism. Subjectively, it was the urge of that integrity of *Naibedya*, which comprehended his country's fulfilment. Objectively, it was the ripening political situation which was to be brought to a head by the agitation against the Bengal partition. Tagore had written a trenchant reply to Lord Curzon's notorious Convocation Address, and he felt sore at the doings of this pinchbeck Emperor. With one hand he was lashing the Government, and with the other he was laying the foundations of constructive nationalism. The political articles of this period would run into a big volume. Here are a few selected at random: *Raj-kutumba* (Relatives of the King), *Dharamabodher Dristanta* (Examples of Righteousness), and *Suvedeshi Samaj* (National Society) in which the programme of rural reconstruction was set forth. These were written in 1904, before Bengal

was partitioned. The well-known poem *Sivaji Utsab* was also composed and recited in the same year. In it there was no trace of 'Hindu' resurgence. Early in 1905, Rabindranath, to implement his political views, started the *Bhandar*, a journal on Co-Operation in which he was ever to remain a firm believer. The article *Raja-Praja* (The Government and the Subject) was an exposure of the economic exploitation of India by the British Raj. The interpretation was sound for the time. Probably, Romesh Chandra Datta's influence was there. Tagore went to Tippera to preside at the Literary Conference and spoke on the necessity of courtly patronage for the revival of indigenous arts and crafts. Tagore was getting interested in this aspect of national renaissance and was unsparing in his efforts to help the new Bengal movement in arts and crafts that had been initiated by E. B. Havell. The poet was ably aided by his two nephews, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath, in this worthy cause.

Lord Curzon soon announced the partition of Bengal, and the Swadeshi Movement began. On the 25th of August, Tagore read a paper *Abastha O Byabastah*, (Situation and the Solution), in which he strongly advocated a policy of constructive non-co-operation. Songs, poems, processions, ceremonies like the Rakhi-Bandhan, the National Fund, meetings of protests kept him busy. Tagore became the idol of the youth of Bengal when the *Risley Circular* prohibiting attendance of students at political meetings and the singing of *Bande Mataram* was condemned by him as the worst shackle ever forged by the foreign Government. His national songs were on every-

body's lips; his presence was detected in the bustee; his house became a rendezvous of all the patriots; his lectures on Politics and Literature were heard by thousands, and he was a political suspect. He was never so popular as he was in 1905 and 1906. He had become the High Priest of Indian Nationalism.

In the meanwhile, his father, Maharshi Debendranath, had died, on January 19, 1905; *Kheya* (Crossing) had been published (1906); he had presided at the first Bengal Literary Conference at Cossimbazar (1906), and had taken an active part in the drawing up of a scheme for the National Council of Education (1906), an institution that was first started to accommodate the students rusticated under the *Risley Circular* and then developed, under the auspices of Sri Aurobindo, into a nucleus of all progressive ideas in nationalism and education. Tagore lectured there on literature (1907). There he came into contact with Sri Aurobindo the fruit of which was the famous poem *Aurobindo, Take the Salutation of Rabindra*. That mutual regard was never diminished for a moment. At a much later date, Tagore would meet the sage at Pondicherry and come back in mute wonder at 'the naked, the pure, the disembodied soul.'

But something very serious was happening to the Swadeshi Movement. It was becoming cribbed and confined within the narrow channels of political hatred. Terrorism was in the air, and violence was repugnant to one who had never appreciated the Tantrik cult of Shakti (Power) and had been nursed on the Upanishads and the Vaishnava Poetry. It was too secretive, much too physi-

cally explosive for him. He had a high regard for the reckless spirit of sacrifice which the anarchists would often betray. (*Vide Path O Patheya—Ways and Means* 1908.) Being an individualist, however, he felt that the party in its pursuit of immediate ends demanded the extinction of personal values. Means he never glorified above the purpose. And then the Hindus and the Muslims were drifting apart. The government was blamed for driving the wedge between them. Not that the government was above reproach, it could not rule without dividing, but he strongly felt that it was equally incumbent upon the leaders to analyse the root-causes of the Muslim aptitude for being easily weaned away from the national movement. So far so good. But there was no one to point out that the Swadeshi Movement was a middle-class expression of certain landed interests which saw in the partition a threat to their legalised exploitation. None realised that the camp-followers were in search of government jobs they could not hope to secure. Tagore too did not comprehend the historical impulses behind the anti-partition movement, the economic incentives of the outburst, and the inevitability of its exhaustion and misdirection as the expression of the basic contradiction in the situation. He only sensed, which others did not, that an agitation could only agitate so long as it had the necessary material ballast of social change. What that social change would be and how it would be brought about he realised in his own subjective, Utopian way of co-operation, self-help, rural reconstruction, indigenous banking and education, voluntary health organisation, and

highly developed political sense; he burned for complete independence; his vision was more comprehensive than of most politicians who strutted and raved on the platform. But his sense was expressed in sensuous language; his attitude was mainly subjective; or else it was that of an ambassador of India, of the East, the Spirit, the Universal; and his imagination was more creative than historical. So he remained a radical, ahead of the procession, or a royal spectator on the balcony taking the salute at the march past of history.

In other words, Tagore had to withdraw into literature and into Shantiniketan. It was no escape into an Axel's Castle, but an attempt at the exteriorisation of his reactions to the failure of the movement. The literature that he would now produce would be of another quality, and the attention to Shantiniketan of a more detailed love. There, in Shantiniketan, Rabindranath got the firmness of a canvas and the stability which an institution could give. Both the canvas and the institution were spiritual urgencies for him, the one for the meaningless rush of movement, and the other for his dream-world. The writing of *Gora* and the daily teaching and coaching in music and acting gave him the much-needed assurance through craftsmanship. It is not the place to discuss the merits of this first great modern Indian novel or to describe what he gave to Shantiniketan. But a few points may as well be noted here. The context of the novel was social, its problems were current without being topical, but its development depended more upon dialogues and debates than upon action, and its

conclusion was somewhat fantastic. Gora, the hero, had conjured up a vision of Hindu, national India. He was realistic enough to give it a frame of personal knowledge. Sucharita's love broadened it, and yet brought out the contradiction between Gora's philosophy and the practice that his heart dictated. The hero, true to his author, had always connected politics with social vitality, but his neo-Hinduism had no room for marriage with the Brahmo Sucharita. Tagore ended the impasse by Anandamoyee's declaration that Gora was an Irish foundling. It was certainly a weak ending for such a novel, but it also indicated the author's general, undefined sense of awareness of the impossible position into which Indian nationalism was being driven by the implicit social contradictions.

e it noted that they were resolved by Tagore by de-ationalisation, and not by declassing. *Gora* was the search for social reality, and also its success upto a point. The personal counterpart of this search was the author's complete identification with the activities of the school at Shantiniketan. Students of this period got the most out of him. His duties would begin early in the morning and end very late in the night. He would teach literature, history, science, geography, music, acting, and what not. One has an impression that in these days Rabindranath was being cruel to himself, that he was over-taxing himself, that he was exaggerating the active side. But with every expenditure, his energy was doubling. Leaving aside all psychological questions of creative art and genius, it is difficult to imagine a more vital man than Tagore in this land where women are old at twenty

and men are born old. Such a vital man could not but seek to balance his personal problems through action. (It is an interesting family-trait. A Tagore must create, build, work ; even a Tagore daughter or daughter-in-law must run at least a couple of institutions.) Or, was it the compensation for being outside the Hindu social system, was it the disease of restlessness in the blood, or was it the 'itch' of objectivity ? Did only dreams beget the jute mills, steamship companies, Swadeshi shops, clubs, music schools, and Shantiniketan ? Or, is it the inverted history of India that makes for introverts and drives them into the fury of milling.

Between 1909 and 1913 when he got the Nobel Award, Tagore's genius yielded bumper harvests. A bare list of his activities should suffice. The first cutting was of *Sabda-tatva* (Bengali Philology), *Dharma* and *Shantiniketan* (Religion and Sermons), *Ingraji-Path I* (First Book in English), *Chayanika* (Anthology of his poems), *Chhutir-Parha* (Readings for Holiday), *Tapoban* (a paper on the ideals of his school), and the *Prayaschitta* (Atone-ment)—that significant drama in which Dhananjaya, the Sannyasin, advocates *Chittasuddhi* (moral purification), passive resistance, non-violence, non-payment of rent and taxes in protest of royal tyranny—a strange forecast of future events, probably one of the strangest in literary history. The next crop (1910) yielded *Raja* (drama), *Shantiniketan* (more sermons), *Gora*, the novel, in two parts, *Gita-lipi* (songs with notations, in three parts), and *Gitanjali*. More volumes of the Shantiniketan sermons, the *Gita-lipi* (Songs IV-VI) and *Jiban-Smriti*

(Remimiscences) began to appear in 1911. The poet composed the famous song *Jana-gana-mana-adhinayaka*, wrote one paper on Indian history, two on Religion, published two volumes of short stories and *Chinna Patra*, a volume of letters later on translated into English and issued as "Glimpses of Bengal," and wrote two dramas, *Achala-yatan* (The Castle of Conservatism), which crystallised the orthodox opposition against him, and *Dak-Ghar* (Post Office), all in the first four months of 1912. Every drama was produced, every difficult part was acted by him. Obviously, it meant a strain. Tagore projected a European tour to recoup his health. In May, 1912, he left for England where his poems, translated by him on the voyage, later on published as *Gitanjali*, created a sensation. He sailed in October for the U.S.A. where he lectured on the Ideals of Ancient Indian Civilisation at Chicago, and on Race-Conflict at the Congress of Races. After delivering the Harvard Lectures, later on published as *Sadhana*, he came back to England by April. He fell ill again and returned to India on September 4, 1913. The Nobel Award was announced in India in November 1913. He was congratulated by all classes and sorts of people and the D. Litt. was conferred by the Calcutta University on one who had not gone even to the final form of a school. The Sahitya Parishad had forestalled every institution by celebrating his 50th birthday at the Town Hall. But then it was *the* Parishad, the true intellectual nucleus of Bengal in those days. The author remembers Tagore's reply to the deputation that waited on him at Shantiniketan on November 23, 1913 to felicitate him on his receipt

of the Nobel Prize. The Poet was hard on his admirers, and all were sorry. But every word that he uttered was true and just. Most of the people who were jubilant were nationalists and snobs. They gave him praise, which was derived from others, when he wanted appraisal, which he deserved even on the score of what he had done in the previous four or five years. This is a hectic summary of the most fruitful period in Tagore's life.

Why was the reply nasty to the deputation ? The date was the anniversary-date of his wife's death—a fact which none had cared to know. Still, the feeling of restlessness, a lack of the usual poise was there, not only in the reply but elsewhere too. It was not difficult to notice a few rifts in his attitudes. Why that glorification of India's past before others and the *Achalyatan* for Indian consumption, Why this travel ? One current explanation was that the Poet was hankering after a world-recognition in despair of his countrymen's default and in reaction to the criticism of the orthodox. The Poet was, no doubt, very sensitive, but it does not fit in with the spirit behind his Sermons, which was seemingly one of equilibrium. Probably, his world being an insufficient objective correlate, he sought for another world, that of Europe and America ; it may also be that the mysticism of *Post Office* was struggling with that of the Upanishadic sermons in the Shantiniketan series. The author of this book has a feeling that Rabindranath was not yet integrated, no, not yet in *Gitanjali*, and that that very incipient disequilibrium was the exciting cause of the burgeoning of his genius and of his movements.

Tagore's personal crisis was not resolved by *Vitanjali* and *Post Office* ; it was just overlaid.

The *Sabuj Patra* (the Green Foliage) period began in 1914. Sri Pramatha Chowdhury, one of the brilliant Chowdhury brothers, had started the paper. He had a mind, a culture and a style of his own. Tagore became the mainstay of the magazine and contributed profusely. Poems, essays, dramas, it never rained but poured. Rabindranath's prose-style passed over to what is known as the Birbali style (after Pramatha Chowdhury's pen-name). The *Balaka* poems, *Chaturanga*-series of long stories, the novel *Gharo-Baire* (Home and the World), and the symbolic drama *Phalguni* (The Cycle of Spring) were all written for the *Sabuj Patra*. There are many students of Tagore who consider that this group of volumes register the Indian summer of Tagore's genius. There are both expansion and maturity in the sentiments, a greater complexity and abundance of energy in the prosody, more directness in prose, more condensed similes and metaphors in the statements, and on the whole, a greater confidence in his own power. All the works, particularly the *Balaka* poems and the *Chaturanga* series of stories, betrayed a sense of construction, an architectonic that was not prominent before. If we study the songs of this period we notice the same feeling for construction. It was of course the feeling that Tagore would have and the construction which it would find fit. Still, the World-view had enriched the feeling with the resulting changes in the structure which was now like a beautiful private temple that had been reconstructed to accommodate pilgrims and devotees from

distant lands. But, probably, the architecture is in his whole life's works, and not merely in this group of volumes or that.

In 1915, Tagore welcomed Gandhiji in Shantiniketan, and staged, at his ancestral house, *The Phalguni* in aid of the Bankura Famine Relief Fund. The first contact between the two great men generated a deep, mutual regard, but probably, also revealed a difference in outlook and approach. They were to meet later on, and with every meeting the esteem increased. Tagore lies seriously ill in 1941; Mahatmaji sends Mr. Desai to Calcutta to enquire; the personal letter is delivered; and tears roll silently down the cheeks of one who was never known to have wept. Mahatmaji undertakes a fast unto death; Tagore gives him orange-juice when he breaks it. Mahatmaji goes to Shantiniketan in 1940; Tagore stands up to receive him; Gandhiji would not let his Gurudeva do so; they embrace. And yet Tagore had not spared Gandhiji when he exaggerated the importance of the charakha, when he explained the Bihar earthquake in terms of the original sin of untouchability. These two men knew each other. No wonder that the Shantiniketan is considered by Gandhiji to be one of the first charges upon the nation's assets; no wonder that Tagore was impatient of any criticism of Mahatmaji whom he called the 'greatest man of the world. Indian culture, its genius, its process, has always worked that way.

The 'national period' may be said to have closed with the fourth foreign tour to Japan and the U.S.A. in 1916. It does not mean that Tagore now ceased to be Indian.

On the other hand, his nationalism was enriched by his new reading of Indian History in the wider perspective. References have already been made to a number of articles on the subject. His view on it may be thus summed up. India was a microcosm of the world. Here had joined many streams to form a mighty current of human endeavour in which the spiritual values predominated. That river had been choked; its bed had to be re-excavated in order that the outlying soil might be irrigated. Then living once more, India had a message for the world. The message was of peace and understanding, of the creative unity of the Spirit, and the dignity and assertion of Personality. Naturally, such an interpretation was Indian, as the Indian would love it to be. It had the touch of the Vedic sage of the forest and of the idealist philosophers of the West; it pleased the higher patriotism, and it was easily recognisable by the 'English-educated' who never discriminated between the neo-Hegelian idealism of Victorian England's full-fledged industrialism and the ruling Indian brand of idealism which was no better than the reflection of the modes of living of an uncomplicated, an inchoate, and yet a stable, land-stereotyped social order. At the same time, it offended the petty nationalists here and abroad. The irony was that while the Indian Government still considered him to be a seditionist, his own people called him names. These names were summed up in the word, 'Internationalist.' It carried a number of innuendoes, from his being an agent of British Imperialism to his being a pale imitation of the great seers of India. The fact of the matter was this: Tagore was critical

of the sentiment of nationalism, but he did not fully realise (1) that nationalism, in Europe, was that particular phase of socio-economic development in which the vested interests had come home to roost, (2) that nationalism, in India, was an uprising of those indigenous interests which had been balked of their divine right to exploit and still had a difficult part to play *vis a vis* the feudal-rural economy of India and the Imperialism of Great Britain, at one and the same time, and (3) that these aspects of nationalism were inter-connected even as contradictions. Economic self-sufficiency was more than a feeling, much more than a throwback to tribalism. Rabindranath thought that nationalism was moved by the cult of power and led to mechanical standardisation. No doubt it did all that, at the same time, it was something more. Rabindranath did not clearly see that Indian nationalism, connected as it was with the rising industrialism, could at least be a step ahead of India's feudal langour. In this context, his tirade against nationalism could not but be misunderstood at home and outside. Rabindranath's foresight about the future of a power-civilization was prophetic; it was more intuitive than analytical, more philosophical than scientific and historical. The prophecy was Hebraic, as was his denunciation. But then prophecy and anger are the solvents of the contradictions of a pastoral age. They do not resolve the problems of the modern. Tagore missed the source of the present power-cult. It was not machine, but the ownership of machines. Tagore's economics were mainly confined to consumption; they did not, could not, extend to production and its relations; therefore, they excluded the

history of production and distribution. And here again was his Indianness. But the Indians wanted him to be an Indian in another way, and so did the West; only the two ways did not meet. How could they?

The internationalism of Tagore which had started before the War was in full swing in its midst. It was an act of high faith. In Japan, he openly criticised the Japanese policy of aggression in China and fell at once into official disfavour. His deep appreciation of the Japanese love of beauty and nature, so beautifully described in his letters from Japan, was not held to be sufficient. After deciding not to go to Vancouver in Canada in protest against the colour-bar, he went to the U.S.A., and at Seattle spoke vehemently against the cult of Nationalism, without sparing the British rule in India. The result was interesting: American press-criticism, on the one hand, and the 'Hindustan Revolutionary (Ghadr) Party's denunciation of the 'the agent of British Imperialism,' on the other. The poet had been knighted in 1915, and the knighthood was 'false colours' to the revolutionaries. A rumour of a plot to kill him was spread, but the poet repeated his lecture on nationalism at various places without police protection. The situation was made Gilbertian when a high official whispered that Shantiniketan was not the school for the daughters and sons of Government servants since its founder had been connected with the Revolutionary party in the U.S.A.. Though the burden of Tagore's lectures was the menace of the nation-State and the policy of Imperialist exclusion and aggrandisement, he spoke in this tour some of the deepest things he ever uttered on Art,

Education and the World of Personality, (later on published in the volume *Personality*). All the important American Universities and the select clubs vied with one another in honouring him. Tagore came back in January 1917, and found the Vichitra Club and the Sabuj Patra group flourishing. These two had collected the best of Indian intellectuals. Tagore became interested in the idea of publishing Bengali books on the Home University Series Model. Nothing came out of it.

But politics would not leave him. Mrs. Besant had been interned, and the repression under the notorious Defence of India Act was ruthless. Rabindranath gave the spearhead to the protest in his famous *Kartar Icchhaya. Karma* (As the Master Wills), a paper that could hold its own against the best that was ever wrung out of the heart of man smarting under political injustice. In the meanwhile, a controversy was raging about Mrs. Besant's presidential election for the Congress. To end it in favour of Mrs. Besant, who represented to him the suffering dignity of India, he accepted the chairmanship of the Congress Reception Committee, and resigned as soon as the controversy was over. The author remembers the reception he got at the opening of the Congress session when he led the chorus of his famous '*India's Prayer*.' The house simply went mad. It is interesting to record that in the heat of this agitation Tagore found time to read a paper on music, *Sangeeter Mukti*, which may be called the *Magna Charta* of Indian music, and appeared at least six times in *The Post Office* as the Thakurda in his drawing room '*Vichitra*' before an audience that includ-

ed Gandhiji, Tilak, Mrs. Besant, Malaviyaji, and many more. Another political essay, *Chhoto O Baro*, (Big and Small) had also been read out before large gatherings in the meanwhile. Mr. Montagu came to see the poet at his house. (No Tagore ever calls first at the Government House). Sir Michael Sadler visited Shantiniketan, and educational views were exchanged. A brilliant satire, called *Tota Kahini* (The Parrot's Training) was written at this time. The autumn of 1918 was spent in a tour in the South where he lectured on various aspects of Indian culture.

The Rowlatt Act had been passed, and Gandhiji was starting the Satyagraha movement in protest. Rabindranath was apprehensive of the forces that would be unleashed. But the Jalianwalla Bag massacre took place on April 13, and the news reached Bengal a month later. Tagore made a fruitless attempt to go to the Punjab. He wanted a meeting over which he offered to preside, and failed. Then came the historic letter to Lord Chelmsford in which he 'gave voice to the protest of millions of my countrymen surprised into a dumb anguish of terror' by renouncing his knighthood. It was a magnificent gesture. For him, the garter meant nothing; for British Imperialism, it meant an awkward position created by an *enfant terrible*; for world opinion, it was only a flutter in the dovecot of some pro-Indian eccentrics; but for India, it signified that Rabindranath was of India, her voice, her conscience, the flag of her dignity, the very reason of her freedom. The day after the letter was sent he called a few men at Jorasanko (his ancestral residence

in Calcutta) and read out his latest experiments in verse-technique, the harbinger of prose-poems. The gathering was select and the food that followed excellent. None of us scented anything. Self-control is a priceless Indian possession; and Tagore was an Indian through and through. 'Which country has produced genuine aristocracy?' the author once asked him. The answer was 'China and India.' No wonder that Tagore loved China, and China loved India, through Tagore and Jawaharlal, two of India's own aristocrats.

The early part of 1920 was spent in Western India, the poet visiting Gandhiji at the Sabarmati Ashram. Rabindranath left India on his fifth European tour in May 1920. He met 'studied coolness' in England and was pained at the British speeches in callous condonation of General Dyer who had 'shot to kill' the unarmed crowd in the closed park of Amritsar. His visit of England was not a success, and he crossed over to France and Holland where he was warmly received. A cable came from the U.S.A. to the effect that in view of the unfavourable popular feeling against him no lecture tour could be arranged. But the poet was not to be daunted; his resolution that they 'must listen to the appeal of the East' took him to New York. *The East and the West*, *The Mystic Poets of Bengal*, *The Poet's Religion* were the three important talks he gave in different places. Two main objectives he had in view viz., to raise funds for the International University which he was proposing to establish at Shantiniketan, and to convey the message of the East to a war-torn world. While his attempts were

being foiled outside by sinister motives, Mahatmaji and Maulana Shaukat Ali came to Shantiniketan and, with the best of intentions, persuaded the students to take to their programme. From the U.S.A. Tagore came back to Europe, again spoke on the *East and the West* in England, came to France, met Romain Rolland, talked on *The Public Spirit of India*, and was presented with a large number of books for his proposed university. From France he went to Germany; Denmark, Sweden, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, and met everybody worth knowing. It was a triumphal procession, and his reception by the youth of the continent was 'frenzied.' He reached India in July 1921 when the non-co-operation movement was at its height. The paper that he read on *Sikshar Milan* (The Contact of Cultures) contained the first reasoned criticism of Mahatmaji's ideals, and provoked a reply from Sarat Chandra Chatterji. Mahatmaji replied to the second essay of Tagore, *Satyer Ahban*, (The Call of Truth) in a remarkable article in the *Young India* where the Poet was described as the Great Sentinel on the Watch Tower. The protagonists of the two view-points met subsequently, and nobody except Mr. Andrews knew what happened. All that the world knew was the formal inauguration of *The Vishwabharati* by Dr. Brajendra N. Seal, in December 1921, with M. Sylvain Levi as the first visiting professor and the Sreeniketan as an adjunct to it for work in rural reconstruction. Tagore handed over his Shantiniketan properties, the Nobel Prize money and the copyright of his Bengali books to *The Vishwabharati* by a trust-deed.

Tagore had attained a world-status by now. His

nationalism had no doubt been tested on many occasions, but the popular memory was short. Gandhiji, however, recognised the wider functions of the Poet. Once Tilak had offered him a purse of Rs. 50,000/- to do culture-propaganda in the world for India, but he had refused. Now Tagore had become the messenger of the East and was wanting money. His internationalism was a bad business proposition. Tagore was always a bad investor. He did not know the market. He was an outsider. He thought that the world was weary of the war and dying for spiritual peace. He felt that the world had at last realised that the war was the logical consequence of the cult of Power, of the worship of the machine, of the apotheosis of the nation-state, of greed and lust, of the disbalance between intellect and morality. The world, however, did *not* realise it, because it was *not* allowed to do so by the dark forces which remained behind the scenes. Those very forces were fostering the conservation of conditions that had led to the war; in fact, they were indirectly preparing for another war, and they saw to it that the message of the East should not be heard. And it was *not* heard. The 'studied coolness' was not a falling off of manners, a mere solecism in taste; it was germane to the hostile criticism that followed him in Germany, in Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, the U.S.A. and in Great Britain. He was not aware of it, but today, thanks to a brilliant piece of research by Dr. Aronson, (*Rabindranath Through Western Eyes*), We know its nature. It was Imperialism, British, French and American; in Germany, it was militarism groomed by the cartels

and syndicates. The enthusiasm for his message among the young was of course genuine, but the social forces were stronger. Then East was up against not a geographical area or a cultural tradition called the West; it was against the latest and the strongest and the most sinister phase of Capitalism that would abolish the barriers and extinguish the traditions only to solve its own contradictions. Tagore's internationalism did not look into the economic realities behind the cultural myths, and his Vishwabharati did not get the money it wanted from monopoly-capital and the armament manufacturers.

The Vishwabharati now possessed him. Many admirers, Indian and non-Indian, also helped. Mr. Elmhirst came with Rs. 50,000/- a year from Mrs. Straight (later on Mrs. Elmhirst) for the Sreeniketan. But it was not enough for the Poet's ideas. He wrote dramas, *Sharadotsab* (Autumn Festival), *Mukta-dhara* (Waterfall), *Rakta-arabi* (Red Oleanders), and gave shows in which he and his staff appeared. The last two dramas were symbolical of his ruling idea, the imprisonment of personality by machine and its standardisation. In each case, personality triumphed. *The Bisharjan* (Sacrifice—a new version) was staged with the same end in view. A tour in the South and Ceylon was undertaken, followed by another to the Western India States. (In between the *Sisu-Bholanath* (child poems) was finished.) The response was not great, because the appeal had the sanction neither of religion nor of the Political Residents. But Tagore only looked like a prophet, not a priest, and idealists among the Princes were rare. It was really unfair to

ask them to stint themselves over their motor cars, banquets, shooting and dancing parties or their *Yagnas* for a vague thing like a University, and an *international* centre of sweetness and light, to boot. But some Princes did help. Obviously, another foreign tour was called for, a tour that would fetch funds from *and* spread the message to the willing part of the world. But messages and contacts were more important for the Poet, and the invitation to China was accepted. Here too, the tide of nationalism had to be stemmed, and 'materialism' in the shape of Westernisation reckoned with. Once that was partly done, the way for Indo-Chinese understanding was cleared. Tagore left in China a school of poetry, a genuine desire to revive the ancient traditions of contact between the two countries, and a host of sympathisers. He came back to India via Japan in July 1921. In Japan there was another bout of plain speaking. One more play, *Arup-ratan*; one more stinging letter to Lord Lytton for his insulting reference to Indian women, and Tagore was sailing for South America to attend the centenary celebrations of Peru's Independence. Tagore met a very remarkable woman there in the Countess Victoria O Campo to whom he dedicated his *Purabi* (*Evening Melody*) in which some of his exquisite lyrics occur. It has been written by one of Tagore's intimates that Tagore carried back with him to India a beautiful chair that had been presented by the lady to him. But, certainly, she was no Maud Gonne. On the way back, the Poet visited Genoa, Venice, and Milan where he discoursed on music.

Back in India, he was not particularly creative. Beyond

his criticism of the charkha programme (*Swaraj Sadhan*, in the *Sabuj Patra*), a few lectures at Calcutta, in East Bengal and the U.P. towns, and the *Natir-Pujāh* (Worship of the Dancing Girl), there is nothing in his 64th and 65th years which could not have been accomplished by him before in a fortnight. The *Kalabhāvan* was started, and an Italian visiting Professor came at the end of 1925 to Shantiniketan with a fine library and Mussolini's felicitations. The eighth foreign tour was mainly at the instance of the Italian Professor. Tagore was still restless over the shape of things.

In Italy, he was a state-guest, and honours were poured on him. Mussolini received him by saying that he had read every work of Tagore translated into Italian, and Tagore in his turn called him a great man and his movement historic. Probably nobody excepting Mussolini himself had been thus honoured in Italy within living memory. Rome, Naples, Florence, Turin, everywhere he was feted in the new scientific manner which is certainly the chief claim of the Fascist to fame. From the children in the Coliseum to the professors in college halls, the receptions were thorough and regimented, and the poet was pleased at the spontaneity of the welcome. But when he crossed over to Switzerland he met Romain Rolland, Duhamel, Frazer, Forel and Salvadori and was apprised of the real nature of Fascism. Garbled reports of his press interviews in Italy in which he was shown to be an admirer of Fascism were put up before him, and the Poet became angry. The letter of repudiation to *The Manchester Guardian* followed. He came to know more about

Fascist methods when he heard a first-hand account of the Matteoti murder from the prosecuting counsel, S. Modigliani, who was introduced to him at Vienna. Tagore did 'for some time' at least 'feel elated' with what he considered to be an appreciation of personality in the theory and practice of Fascism. But he realised his error within a week. Not to talk of Ezra Pound, more politically minded men than Tagore now adorning the various cabinets of Europe and fighting Mussolini continued their appreciation of Fascism quite late in history. Mr. Winston Churchill, for example. After paying a short visit to England, Tagore with his party made for Norway. From Norway to Germany, then to Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Bulgaria, Roumania, Greece and Turkey, he sped like Caesar conquering wherever he went and whatever he saw. It was, however, only the conquest of a bearer of the message of harmony and enlightenment. Kings and prophets, young and old, men and women, clubs and assemblies, all honoured him as the messenger of peace. Europe as such was weary, and it was throwing up dictators in despair. The weariness was no doubt of the ethos, and dictatorship was the refuge of frustration. But beneath the frustration were working other powers that exploited it. Tagore again failed to see that process. The greater the frustration the more frenzied became the hysteric ovation,—'a degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation.' This tour also was not a triumph, but a repetition of the deception practised on all ideal values and those who held them, the youth of Europe and Tagore of the East, by a decadent Capitalism at bay that included

lip-service to ideas of harmony as a part of its superior technique. The lectures that he delivered in this tour were of the highest quality, but they were unrelated to the exigencies of the European situation. But why blame the idealist? Hardy in the preface to his '*Late Lyrics and Earlier*,' 1922, had stammered similar indictments of the tendencies of the age, and he was dismissed as a pessimist. For the 'realists,' idealism and pessimism were only tweedledum and tweedledee, the difference to be brushed aside with one business deal.

Tagore returned to India in December, 1927 from his eighth foreign tour. The *Natir-Pujah* and the *Nata-raj*, two dance-dramas, were staged, and a novel, *Tin Purush* (Three Generations) was written. The texts of the last two were meant for the *Vichitra*, a new magazine. A visit to Northern India intervened between his eighth and ninth foreign tour. This time he went to Greater India, Malaya, Java, Bali and Siam. He was highly impressed by the synthesis of cultures achieved in that part of Asia, and particularly by the dance-forms. Tagore had already loved and admired the Manipur style, and now he knew of another development of the Indian dance. Tagore's exposition of the Balinese dance in his letters belongs to the finest literature on dancing. The Shantiniketan style was in the offing. On the way back he visited Ceylon and Pondicherry where he met Sri Aurobindo. In Bangalore he finished the novel "*Shesher Kabitā*" (The Last Poem) in style which is the high-water mark of the Bengali prose as it had evolved in his hands after his adoption of the Birbali variety. The sophisticated attitudes of the

characters were amply borne by the traffic of their language. In conception, this book was less grand than the *Three Generations* in which had been shown the conflict between the attitudes of the old zamindari aristocracy and the new rich, but without the role of the third generation. If the third generation was that of the *Last Poem*, Tagore's hold over the social reality may be said to have weakened. But the dialogues and the style made amends. One felt that the characters were speaking in Tagore's own tongue. If certain patches were phosphorescent, they could be excused in the name of the sustained incandescence of the whole. In the same year, 1928, was written and published the *Mahua*, a book containing poems that proved that the author knew the secret of eternal youth.

The tenth foreign tour was meant for Canada. After delivering a lecture on *The Philosophy of Leisure* at the Vancouver conference of National Education, he went over to the States to address a number of universities, was repelled by passport formalities at Los Angeles, and came back via Japan and Indo-China. Soon after, the Poet was busy recasting his *Rājā O Rāni* which he named *Tapati*. He took the part of Bikram. The poet was 68.

About this time the poet took to painting. It came out of the inter-linear connections of his Mss. The poet had a beautiful hand-writing and the first sketches were calligraphic. The author remembers how the poet would sit literally for hours with his tubes and bottles of colours, daubing and rubbing, till weird shapes emerged. In painting, as in his music and poems, he would concentrate with the traditional skill of the Indian Yogi, creating, as

it were, from out of the depths of the unconscious. Or was it the Supramind? How could intensity wear that smile? naively asked the European, and the smile for him became only a *persona*, a mask. But it was something totally different for the Indian, a Yogic signature. As yet, however, Rabindranath was secretive about his 'new child.'

Tagore gained confidence, however, when eminent French and German critics thought highly of the paintings which were exhibited in the various continental galleries. He had taken them with him to Europe. In England, he spoke at Birmingham on *Civilisation and Progress*, delivered the Hibbert Lectures (*Religion of Man*), visited Mr. Elmhirst's educational colony at Dartington Hall, and gave an interview to *The Manchester Guardian* protesting against the repressive policy of the Government of India, and particularly, against Mahatmaji's arrest, and the martial law at Sholapur. He went over Germany in July, and met Einstein for whom he had a high regard. His paintings were well-received by the non-academicians. The modernists claimed him as their own. Munich gave him a civic reception, but he did not hear of Hitler. From Germany he went to Russia through Denmark.

The visit to Russia was an important landmark in his life. Though there were the usual official and non-official receptions, Tagore did see what was happening. He met the children, the peasants in the newly started collectives, the labourers in factories and trade unions, and the students. They asked him questions and posed many more.

He was excited about their educational system, their farming methods, and the opportunities they were otherwise receiving for the development of their individual creative abilities. At first, the Soviet method was an 'experiment,' with certain defects of youthful enthusiasm which he hoped would be self-corrected, then a 'miracle' of human achievement, and later, a 'concretisation of his dreams.' That it was an entirely new civilisation, without the interrogation mark, he only partly realised. But an interesting change took place immediately in his conception of property. Being a zamindar, he had held that it was a trust, the position that Mahatmaji was taking about wealth so late as 1940 ; he had felt that unequal distribution was in the order of things, like 'shadow under the lamp' ; but now he realised the social significance of property and would not accept property-relations as sacrosanct. His letters from Russia (the English version of which was duly confiscated from *The Modern Review* office by the Bengal Government) were a surprise to many, because they came from an open mind, a mind that was ever renewing itself, to minds completely closed. Up till the last day of his life Tagore's admiration for Russia never waned. In fact, it was growing in direct proportion to his hatred of Imperialism and his despair at the way events were moving in India and world. More cannot be said about it in this survey. The poet went from Russia to the U.S.A. In New York and Boston his paintings were exhibited. He returned to England in December and was back in India in January 1931.

The poet had now reached his seventieth year. He

was not old. Only once he had been seriously ill. His body, perfectly trained by wrestling from his boyhood days, retained all its vigour by subsequent discipline. Early hours, (he would not miss the sunrise for anything, the Gayatri being his symbol), regular meals, which were more poetic exercises than gastronomic stimuli, and above all, his hereditary strength enabled him to work as only a few Indians of his age could. But Indians felt that they had a responsibility towards his age, and his seventieth birthday was celebrated all over India. The Jayanti celebrations in Calcutta were unparalleled in the artistry of execution and the enthusiasm they evoked. The *Golden Book of Tagore* was formally presented to him at the Town Hall. Before that, he had presided at a monster meeting held to protest against the shooting of two internees at the Hijli camp. The detainees were very dear to his heart. Other Jayanti celebrations were stopped at his own request when Gandhiji was arrested soon after his return from the Round Table Conference. The poet's statement on that occasion was not allowed to be published. The students of Bengal, however, did not desist from having their own show, and presented him with a beautiful address.

The land of Hafiz and Saadi called him now. Tagore left by air and was overwhelmed by the reception of a regenerated Iran. His birthday was celebrated on a magnificent scale by the Government and the people, the press acclaiming him as 'the greatest star shining in the Eastern sky'. After visiting Baghdad and meeting King Feisal he came back in time for the special reception held in his honour by the Calcutta University. The letters

from Iran had been published serially. In poetry, the *Parishesh* (The End) was immediately followed by the *Punascha* (The Post-Script). The first underlined the sense of death that had been creeping over him but which he had been resisting all the while ; and the second, a book of prose-poems, a highly releasing agency for recent Bengali literature, marked a new spurt of life and creative activity. Gandhiji, in the meanwhile, had resolved on a fast unto death, and Tagore rushed to Poona to be by his side. Tagore offered the first drops of orange-juice when Mahatmaji broke his fast.

In 1933, the two dance-dramas, *Chāndālikā* (The Untouchable Girl) and *Tasher Desh* (The Land of Cards), *Bansari* (a social drama), and the short novel, *Malancha*, were written and published. Bombay was visited with the Shantiniketan party, and lectures were delivered at the Andhra and the Osmania Universities. The Ram Mohan Centenary celebrations were presided over by him at the Senate House, Calcutta. Ram Mohan, in Tagore's opinion, was the greatest Indian of the previous century. An interesting exchange had taken place between him and Gandhiji over the latter's description of the Raja as a pigmy. Mahatmaji's argument seemed to be that he would have been greater if he had not known English. But Gandhiji was no scholar of the Raja's works whereas Tagore was his great admirer by the right of succession and understanding.

Pandit Jawaharlal with his wife visited Shantiniketan on January 19, 1934, and the poet held a public reception in their honour. Panditji and Kamala Devi have had their

ample share of affection from the great and the small, but it is debatable whether they got more than what they did from Tagore. Mahatmaji always excepted. Probably, Panditji is more attuned to the spirit of Tagore than to Gandhiji's. Both are citizens of the world, both include India in the march of the world, and both are aristocrats by birth and democrats by conviction. The difference is that Tagore's internationalism was intrinsically an affair of spiritual urges, and Jawaharlal's is mainly one of historical necessity. Beyond that, the two meet again, e.g., Jawaharlal finds Tagore's wishes vague, and the peasantry of Oudh, the Indian youth and Lord Linlithgow, are equally confounded by Jawaharlal's treatment of India's problems in terms of Spain and China and loyalty to Bapuji. Such 'vague' thinkers are probably the salt of the earth. If Lord Wimbourne could hope to govern Ireland 'if only Mr. Yeats assisted,' any democratic President of the Indian Federal Republic could run this bigger geographical unit of India with the assistance of these two 'vague' men who had proved their administrative worth elsewhere, one in the sphere of local self-government and the other in that of rural reconstruction. The Indian tragedy is not in the vagueness of ideals, but in the sinister perpetuation of idealism as a permanent sop to the urgency of material demands.

The next visit was to Ceylon again, and Tagore talked of the *Vishwabharati*. He must have talked about it to Jawaharlal, Gandhiji, Malaviyaji, Subhas Babu, to everybody by now. The stability of that institution after his demise was troubling him, and each tour was conducted

for the purpose of collecting funds for it. Madras, the Punjab, the U. P., were ransacked, and some money, disproportionate to the enthusiasm, trickled in. The poet moved to and fro like a vexed kestrel. Receptions and replies everywhere, celebrations on every birthday, songs and dance-dramas on every occasion, addresses to students, meetings with leaders, lectures, and writing too—the *Char Adhaya* (Four Chapters), *Bithika* (Poems), a hectic life indeed for a man of seventy-four. *Chitrangada* was re-cast in the present ballet-form to get money, *Saradotsab*, *Rajah*, *Sapmochan* were staged for the same purpose, and Tagore made his final North Indian tour. But the artist's primal desire to communicate his creations overlaid that 'hateful' objective. At Delhi, an anonymous donor gave the poet a cheque of Rs. 60,000/-, presumably at the instance of Gandhiji, when he could have drawn a larger amount if only he were less of an artist. On coming back, he was prevailed upon to preside at a huge protest meeting against the Communal Award. His argument was peculiar—it was not anti-Muslim at all. A special service was conducted by him at Shantiniketan on the occasion of Gandhiji's birthday. He also read the address of welcome to Sarat Chandra Chatterji on his sixtieth birthday celebrations in Calcutta. Early in 1937, Tagore delivered the convocation address at the Calcutta University in Bengali and broke all precedents thereby. The Parliament of Religions was held in Calcutta in March, and Tagore presided at one of its sittings. The Maharaja of Gwalior had invited him to his State, and he was preparing to go when he fell.

seriously ill. The All-India Congress Committee was having its sitting in Calcutta and the leaders rushed to his residence. He recovered and ran back to Shantiniketan. A resolution of thanksgiving was passed by the A.I.C.C. Before his illness he had written the *Vishwa-parichaya*, a text-book on science, and during his convalescence the poems known as the *Prāntik* (On the Border), a quintessential volume.

From now the poet's health began to decline. But he was not to be taken unawares. The dramas had to be set to music, a text-book on the Bengali language written, Hindi Bhaban, Cheena-Bhaban, Mahajati Sadan had to be opened, Subhas Bose, Jawaharlal, Gandhiji had to be received, health had to be looked after, and ultimately, the concept of Death had to be cleared. The recovery from the first attack seemed to have given him a fresh lease of life. Mr. Andrews' death made him very sad. Sir Maurice Gwyer and Sir S. Radhakrishnan arrived in Shantiniketan to confer on him the D. Litt. (*Honoris Causa*) of the Oxford University. The poet fell seriously ill again at Kalimpong and was brought down to Calcutta. In December, he left for his beloved Shantiniketan where he received the Chinese Minister Dr. Chi-Tao. During convalescence the following books were written, *Naba-jatak* (Poems—The Newly Born), *Sanai* (Poems), *Chhelebelā* (Childhood Days—Prose in Basic), *Tin-Sangi* (Stories—Three Friends), *Rogsajjaya* (On the Sick Bed) and *Arogya* (Recovery), poems again.

The eightieth birthday at Shantiniketan he could not attend. So the famous message '*The Crisis in Civiliza-*

tion' was read out. It was a bitter indictment of British Imperialism, couched in majestic sorrow and prophetic anger. *Galpa-Salpa* (Short-stories in the form of fantasy) and *Janma-Dine* (On the Birthday, poems) were published on his 80th birthday. These, along with the earlier fantasy *Shay*, the *Vishwa-Parichay* and the *Chhelebel* showed where his prose and poetry, his mind and imagination were moving. They were coming nearer and nearer to the language of the people. The poet could no longer hold his pen ; in fact that master-piece of malediction, *Reply to Miss Rathbone* had been dictated to his Secretary. But the poet's mind was alert ; he was singing songs, uttering poems in bewildering profusion. There was a set-back in June, and the poet was removed to Calcutta from Shantiniketan on July 25, after a most touching farewell to its inmates, its scenes, and its open spaces. He was operated on July 30. Immediately before the operation he dictated his last poem. "*You have covered the path of your creation in a mesh of wiles, Thou Guileful One.*" There was a temporary recovery, and India breathed a sign of relief. But the bulletins proved deceptive. His condition became grave. At 12-13, on Thursday, 7th August, 1941, three months beyond his 80th year, the poet breathed his last at his ancestral home in Calcutta which was the place of his birth. His last rites were performed according to the rules laid down by his father and in the midst of unparalleled sorrow. The ashes were taken in a silver urn to Shantiniketan the next day and duly laid with the utmost solemnity.

Thus closed the remarkable career of one who bestrode

modern Indian Culture like the Colossus. His years were full to the brim and his head heavy with laurels. He was a great man, if ever there was one, not simply an important or a significant man of the age, and so, his heights, taken as a range, never were less than great. But even he died with a bitter taste of this life in India, and of the way events were moving outside India. He was a god-built man otherwise. Probably, his faith in the universal values was not shaken. Maybe, it was, or why should he refer to wile and guile in his last poem? It is not given to this generation to have his faith and conviction. The present age is vexed by the relative and the historical, but if there be values, at once concrete and universal, his life would be a beacon for generations to come.

II

THE APPROACH

PROBABLY, the most convenient way of dealing with Tagore's work in various spheres is to take him as a whole and show the whole development. Any other way will be nibbling at him. The beautiful Indian illustration of blind men describing the elephant should be a warning against taking him piece-meal. A bare summation, on the other hand, would miss the spirit and the dynamics of his creation. Of his greatness, those among thinking people in India who have read him are convinced. Being the creations of a great man, his poetry, his stories, essays, music, painting, novels, and his other contributions deserve to be tested on grounds besides those of mere competence and craftsmanship, goodness and other adequacies. There is an intimacy between greatness and wholeness, and there is a difference between great Art and effective Art. S. Alexander, a significant philosopher, writes in his *Beauty and other Forms of Value* :—"In speaking of great art we are not merely setting two standards and mixing them. We speak naturally of the greater art of the greater man

provided he achieves beauty because he has worked more largely and more profoundly to secure his end." To the two tests of profundity and largeness we may add a third, viz., the greater capacity to approximate to and derive from the principles of growth or development in nature, including human nature in society, in order that the work or works of art may be considered as primarily conditioned by the cardinal processes of living, *natural, human and social.*

Profundity is another name of wisdom. It posits layers of suffering and understanding on the plane of human intercourse, insight into the nature of things on that of awareness, and a positive indication in all kinds of assertion of the potentiality of the reality insighted. The orders of greatness vary as one layer leads or does not lead to the other. In no case is the preceding layer given up, because that is the base. If an author usually stays at the first two levels, as Shakespeare does, his appeal becomes naturally greater. Some of the best Chinese poems betray an insight into the nature of things, of nature and man, and of their interactions, which insight, in virtue of its precision and directness, bears the royal signature of awareness. These Chinese poems are lonely in their freedom from the human give and take, peaceful in their solitariness and retirement, sufficient unto themselves in their economy, and yet are nostalgic. This nostalgia comes from the induced sufficiency of insight into nature and negatively proves the existence of another level. The positive proof of the third level comes, for example, from certain Vedic verses and Upanishadic texts, from St. John

and other passages of The Bible, The Quraan and The Geeta. In their beautiful and convincing affirmation of the higher reaches of consciousness (maybe, of beyond), they are of another artistic order. If the art of the wisdom of suffering and understanding be the play of light and shade of the clouds, that of insight should be of glow-worms in a dark night, and of the last (what name to give it?) of the steadily unfolding effulgence of the rising sun. The above order of profundity, which is an observable fact, is true not simply of literature but also of other forms of art, particularly, music and architecture. It is not at all suggested that either the artist or the other party, *viz.*, the reader, the listener or the spectator, mechanically keeps to one set of evaluation proper to one order. In reality, like the orders in creation, those of appreciation are mixed up. Still, there are things like predominance and elasticity on the creator's side. It is a pity, however, that the other party's predominance is seldom more than a fixity. Another point about profundity : it can never be static, so at least it appears to a modern mind. No artist can be profound today until he unfolds the Becoming. The moment he is held up by Be-ing, he is a mystic of a particular type. Inasmuch as Be-ing is a thesis, every artist is a mystic. When one such is more concerned with the unfolding than with the statement of reality, which to the modern mind is a process, one is a profound artist, such as Tagore was. The logic of unfolding is the common ground of creation and criticism.

Largeness, which is Alexander's second test of greatness, suggests variety and abundance no less than the breadth

of vision. But a few points may be noted. (a) Because of the dialectic of unfolding and discovery, all works of a great artist cannot be of the same order of greatness; therefore, those of the highest order may be few. Hence the reputed 'un-equalness' of the great. But such un-equalness is to be placed in the whole context, just as a valley's quality is in regard to the range. The highest peaks must needs be buttressed by giant altitudes. Tagore's amount and variety are stupendous and astonishing. But his peaks can be counted. At the same time, their neighbourly average is very high.

(b) Complexity need not be a corollary to largeness or profundity. Indian aestheticians insist on *prachurya*, i.e., infinite variety, but they are also particular about clarity or *prasad*, an untranslatable term. *rasad* comes from insight, which is an emission of light. Complexity, if it means 'obscurity' of the European music or the poetry of the thirties, is a disqualification for great art. On the other hand, if it corresponds to the complicated structure of reality so far as it is understood by the artist, (as in Gerard M. Hopkins' *The Wreck of the Deutschland*), it has a claim to greatness. Tagore's greatest poems have a clarity that transcends the need for complexity. His directness brings largeness into order. His complex poems no doubt have complicated rhythms, *vide* the *Balaka* pieces or the *Tapo-bhanga* in *Purabi*, but their syntactical ease, which is different here from the earlier overflow, shows the clarity of his maturer vision. Strictly from the point of view of style or 'riti' of the Indian '*alankarik*,' these poems

evinced a kind of *prasad-guna* which is more satisfying than what can be squeezed out of the compression of the *baidarva-riti*, the best of its kind in the Indian, or out of the intensity of Keats and Hopkins, or the later Yeats, in the English literature.

(c) At the same time, it has to be admitted that on the level of human intercourse between human beings or their contact with nature Tagore's early prose and poetry show prolixity. It cannot be accounted for either by the simpler processes of social living that he had to deal with or by his intellectual incapability. The last is just not true, and the first runs counter to the main finding of modern Anthropology that even the 'simpler peoples' are not simple. Probably, the reason is somewhere between (a) the verbose tradition of Anglo-Bengali literature, (b) his own marked superiority over the contemporaries to whom he felt that he had a duty to perform, note the didactic element and his prophetic role, and (c) his super-abundant vitality. An opinion may be hazarded that his shyness at the academic discipline and approach arising from his truant habits of childhood and their subsequent continuance was also to some extent responsible for the occasional absence of that compression which poets of other type, like Bridges or Eliot, derived from their regular training. [Tagore's intellect had more of the woman's native nervous vigour than of the athlete's muscles. By and large, however, the plenitude of feeling and the flow of language made for a richer quality, *vide Chitrangada*. Images, metaphors, similes tumble there one upon another, but the grand total attains beauty, of a

different type, tropical no doubt, yet a beauty. Elsewhere, as in the poem *25th Baisakh*, the same luxuriance is noticeable, but the transmutation is not occasioned by a more lavish use of *alamkar*, but by a flash from another level, and the poem becomes rich, with a complicated equilibrium, but a unit all the same, and more intense at that.

The third test is the crucial one. In the natural world, the story of the genus, if not of the whole race, is more or less repeated in the life of the individual. The general law of nature is this : ' Ontogeny is a brief and condensed recapitulation of phylogeny '. Secondary changes of the embryonic forms, conditioned by the environment, modified by adaptation to the conditions of life or deliberately induced otherwise, do not, as a rule, change the generality of the above principle; they affect only ' the degree of the faithfulness of the synopsis or condensation of the long and slow history of the stem '. It is only in extraordinary cases that the induced changes lead off the main line. When they do, they do not so much register the crises of variation as of elimination and selection. In the sphere of human action, which is a partly autonomous sphere within the larger one of Nature, the synopsis is less marked, though none the less real. Human geography, social tradition, concerted volition or group action jointly intervene to attenuate the re-capitulation. Yet, social heredity is such a conservative process that the course of crises is still determined by social selection. In other words, the work of a great artist, however ' mutative ' it is, has to be ultimately socially selected and socially appraised. No cult of personality can get over that fact. (To put it from

a different angle : all art criticism is at the first instance naturalistic and sociological.)

An obvious corollary to the third test of greatness is this : any permanent departure of the artist from the above principle does not produce that impression of a natural even which Goethe or Tolstoy or Tagore carries. The complete works of a great writer have an 'organic wholeness' of their own, a stupendous, over-riding, elemental unity, much in the same way as the Himalayan range, or the mighty Gangetic river system has it. If this be correct, then the proper primary approach towards great art, hence of Tagore's art, is to analyse that impression of belonging to the order of natural events, to show the interaction of the parts, the underlying unity and the uniqueness of the whole. The duty of analysing the internal contradictions, the 'faults' in the language of geology, is implicit in the above task.

The approximation, conformity, re-capitulation, synopsis, compression, by whichever name it goes, seems to have its counterpart in the working of the relation between the individual and the collective psyche. Biologists are not always clear on the point whether the mutations or throw-backs are sources of strength for the general line of evolutionary process, whether they throw up higher types of individuals and species or not. In the case of the psychic activity, however, there is a greater need for the individual to dip into the collective, and a definitely greater possibility of deriving new power therefrom and being converted thereby. Nearly all great artists, when they get stuck on a high or a low potential, appear to dive

into some kind of reservoir or stream out of which they come rejuvenated to begin a new life. Some artists do it oftener than others. The history of language, music, fine arts, and of all systematic disciplines of knowledge, naturally, illustrate the above procedure. Individual psyche must needs approximate to the collective psyche at moments of crisis, otherwise it collapses and staggers. The closer the intimacy and reference, the greater is the profundity, the largeness, and also the simplicity of meanings, symbols and images. This is known as touching the soil, going to the roots, divine inspiration and so on, according as the source is conceived to be in the 'lower reaches' in the Egyptian manner, or as 'Grace Abounding' when the common origin is held high up in the heaven in the Hebraic or the Christian fashion. Tagore would trace the origin to Nature, Self, Divinity, *Jeeban-Debatā*, and here and there, to the life of the soil. Whatever the name, the actual procedure is a dialectic one, ascent and descent. The measure of greatness in art is the strength of the artist's hold on this dialectic process.

Organically : Tagore's music is poetical (literary or lyric) as his poetry is essentially musical (melodic). The dramatic music is the induced departure, with the contact with Western music as the minor crisis, and with the folk-music the major one. The broad march of his music before the last crisis remains more or less traditional. His short stories have the completeness of a poem, with 'Nastaneerh' and 'Chaturanga' having the structural complexity of *Nishfal-Kamana* in *Manashi* and *Sha-Jehan* in *Balaka*, respectively. The novels are built around the

social attitude which form the substratum of his political, economic and sociological essays. Both types of prose are bound by (1) his belief in personality, at once concrete and universal, which is the core of his philosophy, and by (2) his faith in process (progression), which is one of the recurrent themes of his poetry. His dramas are lyrical, *i.e.*, poetic, symbolic, *i.e.*, 'philosophy in mask,' and musical through and through. The double entendre of his love-poems has been referred to; really, one never knows if the poet was addressing a woman or the deity. Conversely, his philosophy is unsystematic, in the sense that it is laden with poetry; in fact, it is more a poet's creed than a rational statement. Above all, his life is an art. No man ever looked, lived, talked, behaved like a poet as he did, not even Yeats. This art of living was not, could not be understood by disintegrated individuals who called it a pose, till it was re-named by the same as Indian, prophetic. His paintings do not come within this organic scheme at first, but they do when we remember their calligraphic origin, their complementary nature, even their absence of formal design and presence of the inner rhythmic spontaneity. Play he called this effort.

To sum up : Tagore's works are an organic whole and have an integrity which transcends the particular integrity of this piece or that.

Psychologically : Tagore's intimacy with the collective unconscious was through (1) The *Upanishads* (2) the *Vaishnava Padabalis* and philosophy, and (3) the folk-religion, literature and songs *e.g.*, the *Baul*, the *Sahajiya*

and other humanistic, mystical and synthetic (Hindu-Muslim) cults that had sprung from the life of the people party in protest against the Brahminical ritualism and logomachy. The reference to the deeps was more continuous with Tagore than with other men of his rank because of his particular position, subjective and objective.

But cutting across the inspiration from the sources were two other influences which had acquired the status of 'second nature' with him, *viz.*, the pagan and the rational, as Shree Nalini Kanta has so pertinently shown. Probably, the pagan element was composed of (a) a blend of Kalidasa (of *Meghduta* and *Shakuntala*, books he was very fond of) and Shelley, on whom his lectures were most penetrating, (b) the rural pantheism that would seize the mind behind a keen pair of sophisticated urban eyes looking through the curtains of the house-boat on the Padma, and (c) the pan-entheism of the Vedic hymns to the Dawn, the Sun, the Stars and the Earth, the mighty tree, and the like. (Tagore's conception of Beauty, one of his universals, was not pagan of the Greek type). The rational outlook came from certain non-conformist traditions of Indian philosophy, the protestantism of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and immediately, from the spirit of the time, known as Western Science. It will be wrong to trace Tagore's progressive views, his humanism and his proneness to making experiments to Western rationality alone. Those had their own roots in the soil; they sent the sap up along tubes and channels which Western science and rationality could find convenient for use. The influence of the West upon Tagore

was great, he was always recognising it gratefully, but it should not be exaggerated; it only collaborated with the vital strand of Indian traditions, those which Ram Mohan and Tagore's father, the Maharshi, re-wove for Tagore's generation. Now, all these traditional values Tagore was perpetually exploiting, but never more than when he felt the need to overcome a crisis, to go deeper and be fresher. At each such stage in the evolution of his prose, poetry, drama, music, and of his personality, we find Tagore drawing upon some basic reservoir of the soil, of the people, of the spirit, and emerging with a capacity for larger investment. This procedure continued right upto the very end of his life. There are few instances in history of one who was ever-growing till his eighty-first year. His eternal youthfulness, his perpetual renewal, is a marvel. Yet, the secret is not beyond human comprehension. He was closest to the laws of nature and the Psyche. In other words, his creation gives a more or less clear expression to the laws of change common to the organic and the psychological nature, *i.e.*, dialectics. Hence, the greatness of his Art, and the critic's helplessness. How can a critic with his static logic deal with the creative dynamics of men like Tagore or Goethe?

Tagore's intimacy with *The Upanishads* was at the instance of his father whose illumination is reported to have come from a stray leaf of the Isha. They remained the Maharshi's and the Poet's sustenance. After Tagore's death, his immediate companions have written of his daily contemplation of certain Upanishadic verses. His *Shantiniketan Sermons* contain some of their deepest exposi-

tions; and then, we have a considerable number of his poems which literally take their cue from them, apart from those which show their direct and indirect influence. Sree Kshiti Mohan Shastri also mentions a large number of translations which the poet made of the actual texts. Tagore's interest in the *Upanishads* was further increased when he became the Secretary of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, a sect which in its search for the pristine purity of the spiritual impulse drew mostly from this ancient Hindu literature. It is not the place to go into any detail about the difference between the father's and the son's visions, and between theirs and those of the main schools. But a few salient features may be noted. The Maharshi seems to have emphasised the aspects of Majesty and Truth, and the son of Beauty and Joy, the common ones being Jyoti (Light), Shantam (Peace), Shivam (Good) and Advaitam (Oneness). Design, Majesty and the permeating Energy of God to whom one must resign oneself were the Maharshi's pre-occupations. Tagore's conception was certainly not *ashabdam-asparsham-arupam-abyayam*, but *rupam rupam pratirupo babhuba*. The variation from the orthodox version, however, was wider and deeper. [The Poet had rejected *bairagya* (asceticism) and accepted the fulness of living and nature quite early in his career and was throughout unsparing in his criticism of the Samkarite *Maya*. Neither in the *dvaitadvaitya* nor in the *visistadvaitya* school was Beauty or Joy the central theme. The orthodox philosophical versions had moved round about comprehension as the chief means of realisation. Tagore's may be said to have revolved round two foci, *prana* ('Sar-

bam pranan ejati nihsritam ' was his favourite verse) and *anubhuti* (as against *upalabdhi*). A still deeper difference came from his affiliation to the Vaishnava philosophy of Love which gave him a semi-anthropomorphic divinity, *Jiban-debata*, by whose help he could bring or bind the Infinite within the Finite. Once that was done, the Infinite became the Person needing the love of the human person and answering to his needs. At one period, Tagore was becoming almost a Vaishnava humanist.

But 'almost,' not completely, because Tagore was never ready to extinguish the little person by the light of the Supreme Lover. The humanised divinity of Krishna could not appeal to him, and a complete abandon to the soul of Rasa was foreign to his modern attitude. (*Vide* the attitude of Sacheesh in the *Chaturanga*.) It is also likely that the *Aisvarya* or *Baibhava* aspect of the Godhead was more akin to his pagan love of nature than the *Rasa* aspect. If we like to say with Professor S. N. Das Gupta that "the fundamental creed of his faith consisted in perceiving God in himself—the God that dwells in us as an unfathomable reality"; or with Nalini Kanta that "No doubt he has admitted that the 'I' has no existence separate from God, but (for him) a deeper and a more mystic truth is that God has no existence separate from that of the 'I'," we cannot but conclude that Tagore grew out of the general Vaishnavite tradition, and spiritually, came close, very close to that of the *Sahaj-Baul*, for whom God is the resident of the still centre in the human heart, and for whom God is ever anxious to realise Himself in the *Bhakta*. Some critics have traced his

divergence from the Vaishnavite tradition to Browning. Factually, it may be correct, because Tagore was a great admirer of Browning's poems, if not of his poetry, but two other specific urges, viz., Tagore's own poetic necessity for holding firmly on to the Finite, the human, the person, and his deep interest in the *Real song*, should be given at least an equal status. These two urges once again show the dialectics of a great man's development.

When we touch these rural post-mystic creations, we come to the deepest collective reservoir of Indian culture. The author makes this claim on behalf of the doggerels, the folk-songs, the folk-literature in the shape of legendary and mystical cycles and talks which the rural post-mystics composed, recited or sang, and of the innumerable mystic-cults they started and scattered all over India, that they represent Indian culture more fully, because more socially, more democratically, more comprehensively, more intimately and vitally, than Kalidasa, Bhababhuti, Bhask, and the rest of them do in literature and the reputed ones among the prophets do in the sphere of religion. In philosophy too they symbolise our culture better than the six or sixty systems on which hundreds of commentaries have been written. Anybody who knows India and interprets culture as a social process will accept this claim. Tagore found out very early, (vide his essays on the doggerel), that the folk-literature was the root while the one that had been and was being produced was only the 'paper-flower.' He also realised that mass-literature could only be produced on the basis of the principles of folk-literature. If he did not succeed in making his own

literature fit for the masses, he did succeed in his songs, which are also literature.

Tagore had been keenly interested in the simple, human philosophy of the Baul singers, and Sree Kshiti Mohan Shastri was there to feed his appetite. Meanwhile, Tagore was getting spiritually ready for it. He could not accept the complete immersion of the Vaishnava *bhaktapremik* in the Personal Divinity of Krishna. The Vaishnava *bhakta's* sadomasochistic or symbiotic complex was as foreign to his psyche as was the automatic conformity of the Vaishnava ritualist. So he wanted an ally in a system that was no system, in a philosophy that was based upon one's own experience, that was non-induced and spontaneous, and in which the little person could hold within himself and thus define, but with unabated intensity, the Infinite that was neither the monistic Absolute of the Vedantin nor the Father in Heaven of the Christian. The humanity of the Baul possessed him at the period when *Falguni* was being written. [His acting of the Blind Baul with *Ek-tara* in hand and his singing of the folk-tunes are an unforgettable experience for the fortunate. The songs of this period, and there were hundreds of them, were composed in the Baul style.] In one of his well-known addresses he referred to these village mystics, and quoted a poem by Rajjab, an unknown Muslim mystic, as an example of the noblest and the purest poetry he had known. But let not the nature of this Sahajiya influence be misunderstood. He was deeply indebted to the mystics, but he made their message his own. Their esoteric practices and their secret meanings could have no

endless beauty across the lightless world of facts." On the objective side of contents too: "But the artist finds out the unique, the individual, which yet is in the heart of the universal. When he looks on a tree, he looks on that tree as unique, not as the botanist who generalises and classifies. It is the function of the artist to particularise that tree. How does he do it? Not through the peculiarity which is the discord of the unique, but through the personality which is harmony. Therefore, he has to find out the inner concordance of that one thing with its outer surroundings of all things." The last sentence meets the charge against Tagore's vagueness, his frequent use of abstract nouns for the concrete. It seems that in Tagore's view the personality of the artist rubs out the *individuality* of things, their essential character, in response to the challenge of the Supreme Person. "For the true principle of Art is the principle of unity." Of course, it is the Creative Unity of Personality, not merely the Creative Evolution of the Life Force. This is an important difference with the views of Bergson who may be described as any centrally frustrated poet's philosopher. (He is also such a man's prophet. Isn't he one of the fathers of Fascism?)

Even when Tagore is specifically discussing the meaning of rhyme and of the nature of Bengali rhymes and metres, (*Chhanda*) he is putting poetry in the wider perspective of Art. Thus "In poetry also we want to sense this self-divination (*atmanubhuti*) in a pure and free yet a varied manner." Again: "Aitareya Brahman says, '*atma samskritirbab silpani*.' Art is '*atma-samskriti*.'" He

quotes again : ‘ *Chhandomayam ba etairjajaman atmanam samskurute* ’ i.e., the priest of this ritual of art cultures his soul, makes it rythmic. If we pay due regard to all these views of his on Art, it is rather difficult to equate Tagore with poetry, and lyricism at that, in a way as to leave him no residue. The fact is that he had many residues and that each such was as pertinent to him as his poetry. Much rather would we take him as a person, i.e., to say, a human being whose primary interest is in the *sanskriti* or the culture of his soul, Art being the best way and means. The above point of view does not at all signify that like many frustrated Europeans and Englishmen, Art or Poetry for him was a substitute for religion. Nothing like it. As he put it, “ In India, the greater part of our literature is religious, because God with us is not a distant God; He belongs to our homes, as well as to our temples....Therefore, religious songs are our love songs, and our domestic occurrences, such as the birth of a son, or the coming of the daughter from her husband’s house to her parents and her departure again, are woven in our literature as a drama whose counterpart is the divine. It is thus that the domain of literature has extended into the region which seems hidden in the depth of mystery and made it human. It is growing, keeping pace with the conquest made by the human personality in the realm of truth. It is growing, not only into history, science and philosophy, but with our expanding sympathy into our social consciousness. The classical literature....threw no light upon men who loved and suffered in obscurity....This encroachment of man’s personality has

no limit, and even the markets and factories of the present age, even the schools where children of man are imprisoned and jails where are the criminals, will be mellowed with the touch of art, and lose their distinction of rigid discordance with life. For the one effort of man's personality is to transform everything with which he has any true concern into the human. And art is like the spread of vegetation, to show how far man has reclaimed the desert for his own." Nobody would identify this humanism with the scientific humanism of the positivists. It is *personalism*, of the Indian type, if you like, this understanding of poetry, music, dance, painting, *i.e.*, Art as self-culture, this expansion of self by the sweet conquest of the impersonal and in response to the challenge of the Supreme Person to dare and do. Obviously, the resistances offered by the modern man to such a view of Art and poetry are many. At the same time, if the modern man can somehow suspend his disbelief, he is not denied a rich banquet in Tagore's poems. The modern man would like to enjoy what he calls 'pure' poetry, he would expect a discussion of Tagore's purely poetic stuff to recognise its claim to greatness. It is no doubt possible, in fact, easy, in the case of Tagore, if one concedes, which the author does not, except figuratively, that pure poetry as such exists. There are many poems of Tagore which are technically 'pure' and musically perfect and which satisfy all other tests set by modern critics for the judgment of poetry and style. One can without difficulty apply them and award Tagore full marks. But the totality of Tagore's own views runs counter to the applicability of the above critical

method. Occasionally, no doubt, he would express himself in a way that would invite it, particularly, when the psycho-analytical, or lately, the Marxist criteria were being fastened on his poetry. But, by and large, the best way of looking at the organic corpus of his poetry is in terms of personality. It is needless to assert that personality is neither individuality nor character. It is 'the soul in the process of culture,' the little man responding to the challenge of the Supreme Person.⁷

But there are professors of literature and their students who must be placated. So we take up this technical question of Tagore's metre. Before we do so, his metrical inheritance may be briefly stated. Bengali metrists before him were very few indeed: Michael Madhusudan being the most prominent of the nineteenth century and Bharat Chandra of the pre-British period. Enveloping Bengali metres were those of Vaishnava lyrics and Sanskrit poetry, and subsuming them were the folk-metres. (Tagore wrote that he was indebted at a certain stage to Bihari Lal Chakravarti, one of his senior contemporaries, and to his eldest brother, Dwijendra Nath, for his inspiration to change the metrical forms. But these are small debts that can be written off.) The literary metre current was *payar* of 14 syllables with two rhyming feet, each foot having two separated groups or bars, the first group of eight and the second of six *morae*. Its chief varieties were (1) *tripadi*—the short, (6+6+8) and the long (8+8+10) with the first two bars rhyming in each case, (2) *chaupadi* (6+6+6+5) with the first three bars rhyming, (3) *ekabali* (6+5), and (4) *malati* (8+7) by adding one more

to the *payār* disposition. (*Payār* was not invariably quantitative. It was subservient to the needs of pronunciation which would prolong or shorten the unit of time.) More important than this numbering are the other features of the *payār* class. (1) The vocal drawl of the *payār* over-rides the syllable sound. It is this sing-song quality which puts the syllable in its proper place in the group (*parba*), and partly robs the consonants of their quantitative value. The subordination of syllables to the flow of sound makes the introduction of a large number of them possible. *Mora* thus eventually ceases to become important. (2) It approximates to the speech-rhythm of the Bengali language in so far as the Bengali pronunciation starts by giving weight at the beginning and losing it at the end. (Bengali ethos?). So if more than one *mora* be given to the closed syllable (*halanta*), then (a) the weight may be adequately distributed, consequently, (b) the abruptness of the closure avoided, and (c) the weight of the sense or reference adequately conveyed. (3) Tagore has himself referred to the seeping quality of *payār* in his "Chhanda." By examples he has proved that within the ambit of $8+6=14$, it is quite possible to introduce diphthongs. They, in fact, fill up the vacuum in the drawl. The same is true of heavy syllables. None disturb the rhythm materially. (4) The *payār* rhythm is slow, and when diphthongs, heavy and compound, or composite syllables are not present, it can be monotonous. The reason is implicit in the Bengali pronunciation which does not usually give a long time unit to them and does not

pause after them. (Ethos, again, in avoiding the heavy and the difficult?)

Thus we see that the *payar*-class had great possibilities in the hands of a master, who was, in this case, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the author of *Meghnadbadh-kavya*. His great contribution was to convert the *payar* into run-on (enjambement) unrhymed lines in which the sound-groups, re-arranged by composite words, diphthongs and so on, broke up the drawl and made for bigger and more complicated waves. His use of the caesura was Sanskritic, no doubt, but it was also made at the instance of the meaning sought to be conveyed. Though the nature of the Bengali-spoken tongue and of the language remained more or less foreign to Dutt, his enjambements and pauses were pointers for Tagore. What Dutt left for Tagore to do with *payar* was to make it closer to the natural *dhhani* of Bengali speech.

The Sanskrit metres were there, no doubt, for Tagore to exploit. But beyond recognising the importance of long-short (*laghu-guru*) sounds, the unequal *morae* and *yati* (pauses) he did not make extensive use of any of the well-known types, like *mandakranta*, *sikharini*, *malini*, etc. The reason was obvious—Bengali speech does not usually make use of the long vowel, and in its nervousness slurs over the pauses.

The Bengali doggerel verses of folk literature are the closest to the speech-rhythm of the people. In that speech, the closed syllable seems to determine the shape of the sound-structure, and the consonants the verbal texture. The abruptness of the closed syllable releases the power

of the subsequent consonants to vary the ease of sound succession and partly prolongs the *morae* of the preceding vowel. Tagore was the first to realise the possibilities of the folk-metres and was always referring them to the younger poets. "It is my conviction that all types of poems in all types of *chhanda* can be written in this native (pure) Bengali." Its great value consisted, in his opinion, in its *prāna*, vigour, and in the impunity with which it would absorb all kinds of foreign words. He practised on it as early as his "*Kshanika*" days (1900). His last great plea for the speech-rhythm of the people was entered before the Calcutta University. Tagore's experiments with the folk-metres are numerous. All kinds of subjects from the gayest to the heaviest have been clothed by him in these folk-metres. The 'aristocracy' of Tagore's poetry is in the opinions it carries, it is not always in the happiness of his verses.

Tagore's poetic contributions are the release of the energy pent up by the old shackles and the creation of a bewildering variety of metres, accents and rhymes. The release came through the substitution of sound values for the syllabic which was based more or less on a defective system of writing. It was done chiefly by the manipulation of the 'potential energy latent in the closed syllable' or *halanta*, and the resultant doubling of the *morae*. The bimoric is practically Tagore's own creation. Here probably the Sanskritic and the *padāvali* metrical values pointed the way. *Sandhya-Sangeet* (1881) contained the first symptoms. A fuller exploitation of the *payar* than that of Michael Madhusudan was evident in

the rhymed enjambement, the prolongation of 14 into 18 syllables, both rhymed and unrhymed, and the ultimate discarding of the units to make the verse free and flexible. *Balaka* (1914), *Parishesk* (1932) *Rogsajjaya* and *Arogya* (1941) contain the best examples of 'free verse' or '*muktaka chhanda*.' After *Balaka* none could say that the Bengali language was unsuited for the most weighty and complicated sentiments. But subsuming this releasing and creative work was his discovery of the great truth that the Bengali language as spoken by the people in their daily life had a personality of its own. His own metric development consisted in the exploitation of that truth by making his poetry draw more and more from it, and thus coming closer and closer to it.*

Tagore's march towards metric freedom through the forest of his experiments and creations can be indicated now: The pointer is in *Sandhya-Sangeet* (1882), no doubt, but it is clear for the first time in the poem called *Nishfal Kamana* (Fruitless Desire) of *Manashi* (1890), his first major work. He stuck to the usual path up till his *Kalpna* (1900), though he was interested in exploiting the enjambed verse in his *Chitrangada* (1892). But *Kshanika's* (1900) importance is no less great. It gave up the poetic subject and found the folk-rhythm. From 1900 to 1914 Tagore wrote great poetry by his own laws, but in the *Balaka* series (1916) he got back his original impulse. The verse, the rhythm and the metrical mastery

* The specialists on this question are A. D. Mukerji, Sudhindra Nath Datta, Probodh Sen, Dilip K. Roy, Buddhadeb Bose and Girijapati Bhattacharya. The first two disagree in details with the next two. All agree on the essential points. What follows in the next Para is based on Sudhindra Nath Datta's articles and chapters in the *Scagala*.

of these poems are unrivalled in their vitality. Another poet would have stayed there. Careful readers in Bengal thought that nothing further could be humanly achieved. But Tagore was not the one to satisfy them. As yet, the freedom of those verses was not that of free-verse. Urged by a stronger necessity than is known to critics, he pushed on to the pauses of *Palataka* (1918), pauses which were away from the respectable caesura of literature and were intimate with the breath-groups of the spoken tongue conditioned as these were by the meaning and the subject-matter. What *Kshanika* could not do completely was done now, viz., the opening up of the flood-gates of the subject-matter of poetry and the resultant flow of meaning in all its shades and twists. Tagore was getting more and more objective in his poetry. (The connection with the heightened social consciousness of this period is obvious.) Even then, in *Palataka* the meaning and the sequence of the story-element determined the form. For the time, he felt like splitting up his process, and wrote *Lipika* (1922) a collection of prose-poems. These pieces looked like prose and were included by himself in his prose-works. But on reading them aloud one detected the inner rhythms which were a simultaneous continuation of those of *Palataka* and of certain experiments in prose that he had made. The next phase was that of *Sishu Bholanath* in which the simplicity of diction was astonishing. *Prabahini* (1925), *Purabi* (1925) and *Mahua* (1929) poems were not free verse. The trail was again taken up in *Parishesh* (1932) and *Punascha* (1932) along the lines of *Lipika*. Be it noted that after his return from Russia

in 1930, these were the first major works in poetry, just as the *Balaka* series were of the war period of 1914-18. The prose-poems had arrived at last, driven by deep urgencies. For some time, this perpetual youth continued to use poetic subjects and write prose-poems *e.g.*, 'Camelia' in *Punascha*, that could hold their own in their new garb against the best in the old. But he dared further, till we find him taking up all manner of subjects, including the waste-paper basket. It was not realism in the usual sense, because even through the least poetic of subjects Tagore would peep. The realism was of another sort: it was an acceptance of the object, a poetic affirmation of the firmer faith that an individual could grow only by relating the object to his personality.

In other words, Tagore's objectivity meant now that personality should develop through a relation between the self and the not-self. Tagore's 'realism' was a quest for freedom, away both from the dictatorship of the Word and of Things, but in democratic association with them, along the spiral path of progress, and in terms of personality. From *Punascha* to his last works, like *Rogsajjaya* and *Arogya* (1914) it was a broad march to freedom, to directness, concreteness, compression and clarity. Tagore had struck the basic vein from which prose and poetry branched off. His *Nishfal Kamana* (The Fruitless Desire of *Manashi*-1881). had become very fruitful, and his *Manashi* had been transformed. Was it transmuted?

The above is a bare, very bare summary of Tagore's development in versification. Even then, we cannot fail to have noticed that Tagore more or less created

the language of his poetry and constructed more or less a complete set of its structural laws through his practice. (May we add that his lectures and writings on prosody are still the best of their kind?) He repeated in his metres the history of the language of poetry and made new history by consciously drawing from the reservoir of folk-verse and rhythm and of common speech.

It is not physically possible to discuss even all the important books of poems by Tagore within a short, non-scholarly volume like this. There are many ways of choosing them, but from the point of view urged here, *viz.*, the process of the whole, the changes in the development of his personality should form the selective principle. The first movement of the process has this psychological range—the self-sufficiency of the world of beauteous dreams to a perception of its inadequacy, complacency with the riches of Nature to the contemplation of human relationship, and an attempt at a compromise between the physical and the human nature in terms of Universal principles like Joy and Harmony to the sensing of a particular principle, *Jibān-Debata*, guiding but not yet integrating his self and non-self. This takes the reader from *Sandhya-Sangeet* via *Prabhat Sangeet*, *Manashi*, *Chitrangada*, *Sonar Tari*, *Chitra*, *Kalpāna*, *Naibēdyā*, *Kheya* to *Gitanjali* (1910). The moods of this stage are various, and they are the ruling notes of the different books. In the next movement, more or less antithetical to the first, (not contrary, because early symptoms are observable), the theme is his pre-occupation with ‘process.’ From process *per se* to the discovery of its contents in terms of the world and

of humanity, as in *Balaka*, was a very important step. The dream-world was being peopled at last. As yet, humanity had been a state of mind, and not a felt physical fact. The onward drive towards objectivity became noticeable in books of free or near-free verses, *Palataka*, *Lipika* and *Punascha*. But the earlier attitudes which by now had been crystallised into 'personality' made him equate the call of objectivity with the challenge of the Supreme Person. And we come to his last individual poems starting from those of *Parishes*. In between, Tagore had moved to and fro, as in *Purabi*, *Prabahini*, *Mahua*, picking up his old trails and blazing them away. Therefore, the continuity is not linear at all. It is not an ascent through devious ways either. Poems of Being (enjoyment of nature, offerings to God, etc.) and poems of Becoming (process, God hankering after man, etc.) are both there. But there was a crisis deep down when one verily passed into the other. It shook him into making the choice of subjects unlimited and the verse freer and freer, till it landed him into a new equilibrium, of course, with a tilt towards his initial premises.

Apart from the story of Tagore's development there remains the question of appreciation. Today, there is hardly anybody who has read his poems in the original and denied their claim to greatness. Impulses differ, and the author can only indicate his own reactions. It is really difficult to describe them, because the reactions themselves have been so conditioned by Tagore that they have become part of the author's nature. Still, an attempt is worthwhile. Tagore's poetry has created a world of its

own. This world is not physical, not rational, not intellectual, not one of categories and statements. It is primarily one of feeling, generally avoiding passion or strong emotions. The feelings are variegated, each one subtle, fugitive, delicate, sensitive. It is a world of galvanometers and crescographs registering the slightest reaction, not of the heart and the brain, but of some intermediate organ or some nerve-ganglion or some unknown gland from which the general awareness of beauty and sensibility is secreted. This awareness speaks in verse, in images, similes and metaphors, and volubly too. The lineaments of specific feelings or objects melt into one another, Nature (the nature of riverine Bengal) blending into the behaviour of man (the Universal man usually, the common man occasionally) and man merging into the Divine who is of course neither the Brahman of Shankar nor the Blue Lord of the Vaishnavite. This universe of sensibilities and of sensitive awareness is so complete in itself, so human, so beautiful and so joyous that it appears to be a counterpart of this universe, its substratum, its culmination, its abiding truthfulness.

And then the easy flow of it all: The syntax is simple, no hard breathing is involved, only a catch at the throat, hair standing on end, probably a tear or two at the sheer beauty of vesture and the aptness of the fit. The small pieces are gems of ecstasy, crystallly clear so that one can see through them; and the long ones are tapering flames waving at the breath of their own sentiments.

And then what a vision other poems open, of the landscape of Bengal, (Tagore is the first nature-poet of

modern India), of the mind of a child, (Tagore is the master in this genre) and of the wishes of the human spirit for fraternity and harmony, of humanity and divinity. All ages, all moods, both sexes have had their vistas enlarged by this poetry. The combination of the subtlety of the mood with largeness and spaciousness is one of the deepest impressions left by Tagore's poetry.

Such impressions can be multiplied *ad infinitum*. One likes to mention his historical poems, his national songs, in fact all his songs, his light verses, his aphorisms,—they are a royal banquet in their munificence and variety.

But there are other impressions too. The world of Tagore's poems, we are not referring to the rare individual ones which are on the level of human suffering but to the impression which the entire corpus of his poetry leaves, appears to be a substitute one. Its verisimilitude is certainly of a higher order than that of magical prayer, of hypnosis, of illusion, delusion, hallucination, or of dreams. At the same time we do sometimes feel that it is not given to us to feel certain by his certitudes. We find it difficult to accept his notion of objectivity as instruments of personal development in answer to the challenge of the Supreme Person. For most of us today, objectivity has an independent and material basis, and its function is neither to serve as a framework nor as a tool of the subject. Today, matter is not an adjunct to the idea, and history is not a pageant or a Chinese scroll or a cinematographic succession. We too urgently want a world-view, but more in consonance with our experiences, private and public. Many private experiences have been

ground' for the poet of the new humanity. He also wrote, 'I do not trust my own achievements.' While in No. 10 of *Arogya* he called 'they who work' the proud inheritors of India, in No. 9 of the same book he kept the Nataraj 'silent and solitary.' Why did his faith in the joyous Universe flicker as it did in at least three poems? And why did he stop following up the logic of *Kalantar* (Crisis— an Essay), that remarkable account of Indian history, to its conclusion, which is assuredly a linkage with the world? Was he afraid of the next step? It will be argued that it was not the business of the poet. But then, the author's conviction is that he was more than a poet, and many others expected him to behave more than a poet, and eventually he did behave like one who was more than a maker of poems. In any case, he could not abdicate his humanity bound as it was with his times; he could not very well forego the man Tagore, the historical Tagore in the Poet Tagore. He did not want to do it either. How else can one explain his deep concern with the destiny of his country and of the world, his exhortation to India to know the West and to the West to understand the East, and his diatribes against nationalism, the cult of power, and the dull, barren, arid standardisation of the machine-age? Why did he himself point out the heightened World-consciousness of the *Balaka* poems? The needs of the age had to be satisfied by him, and he knew that he had to do it. That work could not be done by anybody else. He satisfied the needs of the age more than others did, and by Imagination.] But is it possible to know this modern age without Historical Reason? Its transmutation into

IV

NOVELS AND STORIES

[TAGORE wrote twelve novels and a large number of short stories. Much has been written on the former and very little on the later. Tagore himself felt that it was unfair. So does the author.

[Tagore's stories are to be classed with the best of the world's, whereas his novels, however good they are, do not belong to the order of the Russian or the French classics.] Though his earliest novel, *Bau Thakuranir Hat*, was written as early as 1883, and the last two, *Malancha* and *Char Adhyaya*, in 1934, yet he cannot be described as a 'professional novelist.' *Chokher Bali* (1903), *Gora* (1910—the Gitanjali year), *Chaturanga* and *Ghare Baire* (1916—the *annus mirabilis* of Indian literature, with *Falguni* and *Balaka*, all published in the *Sabuj Patra*), *Shesher Kabita* and *Jogajog* (both in 1929) are the volumes on which Tagore's reputation as a novelist depends. Each one would be building a career anywhere for anybody, but none with the probable exception of *Gora* would be called great. Even *Gora* has a number

of loose ends and the conclusion is weak. Structurally, *Chokher Bali* and *Chaturanga* are much stronger, though their 'body' is thinner. In *Ghare-Baire*, the jumpiness at the end does not correspond with the slow evolution of the psychological conflict and bears only a seeming relation to the flow of rhetoric. *Char-Adhyaya* has no mid-riff. *Shesher Kabita* is a *tour de force* of style. The foregoing remarks are not meant to suggest that the defects in novel-construction arose out of Tagore, the Poet. Nor do they insinuate that the novels are unworthy of him. There are very pertinent reasons to believe that Tagore could and did separate the poet in him from the novelist. Even the less successful novels did reveal flashes of genius, e.g., his deep understanding of the psychological situation between two or three individuals. It may also be held that he is the greatest Indian novelist. What is submitted here is that that standard is not enough. Tagore is of the World, and for him world-standards must obtain, provided that they do not run counter to his principles of creation. His principles were no doubt separate, but certainly they were not opposed to those of Tolstoy and Dostoevesky, even if we exclude Turgeniev, Balzac, Stendhal or Flaubert, Fielding or Dickens. The chief characters of the first two novelists are also primarily interested in the development of their 'personality' (not individuality, please), as Tagore's characters are, but is it possible to maintain that the equals of Andrew, Pierre, Levine, Alyosha, Nehludoff, Muishkin, even of Turgeniev's Bazarv and Maria, in the roundure of being and in the intensity of becoming, are to be found in Tagore's novels?

Even the spirituality of the two characters, Paresh Babu and Master Masai in *Gora* and *Ghare-Baire* is not of the same level as that of Father Zossima or Alyosha. No, no, to maintain otherwise is patriotism, and not appreciation.

What then is the reason? It is deep down. Tagore's faith was in spontaneity. Negatively, he had protested against all kinds of barriers, of the family, (specially those erected by the mother—the contempt for the 'babies' is profound), the caste, the rituals, the group, the party, the nation, the administration, the machine, and also of idealism. The protest was personal and public. His family's peculiar position, his own status therein, his Upanishadic inheritance, his self-education and the objective situation in which he found himself, in their totality, made him believe in and draw from an inner fount of creative impulse. As in literature, so in music, painting and dancing, he was always keeping a jealous guard over the purity of the creative urge. His instructions to the teachers at Shantiniketan were grounded on that belief and that practice. Not that he was blind to the virtues of discipline. His own daily life that began often at four in the morning and ended at twelve at night was rigorously conducted. He would exhort the students of Shantiniketan to cultivate the obstinacy of self-control. The seventy years of his conscious life were a long-drawn exercise. And yet, it was all *self-control*, *self-discipline*, *self-possession*, and *self-development*. In the political sphere also, he referred to the Indian *genius*, the *personality* of a country, as the premise of growth. Obviously, such an abiding faith reflected itself in his other convic-

tions. His idea of the process, for example, was at first of continuous movement. Once connected with his idea of personality, this idea became Creative Unity. It was, for him, a synthesis, no doubt, but if we look into the sources of the Unity, we come to the spontaneous creative urge of the *person* responding to the challenge of the Supreme Person who, for him, was the Artist, the Player. For Tagore, no other force operated but this as the source of the process and the impulse behind its laws. Therefore, Tagore sized up the problem of artistic creation as one of releasing the dormant energies of the *person*. Naturally, his principle of artistic appreciation also was the discovery of the unfettered *prana* and the tracing of its easy unfoldings. He was impatient of the 'drudgery' of craftsmanship, though without knowing (and admitting) it, he was a master-craftsman. His advice to the artist and the critic could be thus framed : Take the *whole raga*, understand the *spirit*, the *rhythm* ;—deliberate, willing and conscious artifice never gave the clue to the whole, to the guiding motive and the binding religion of a work—personality alone can do so. It was *laissez faire* in Art. No wonder that it occasionally became *laissez-aller* in that sphere of artistic activity, *viz.*, novel-writing, where there is greater scope for freedom in the development and arrangement of characters and situations, in the expression of opinions, and in the conclusion. The faith in creative urge and unity in personality exacted its penalty in the

uncertain engineering of the novels. (One or two anarchic results in Bengal of this emphasis on spontaneity will be mentioned later.)

Within the limits indicated above lie all the merits of Tagore's novels. If their social context is not an integral texture, it is the inevitable background. It posits problems which are reflected in the characters, in their talk and action. [The degree of intrusion of the social problems is the highest in *Gora*.] Neo-Hinduism *vs.* true spirituality, nationalism *vs.* social responsibilities, caste *vs.* the larger groups, and similar conflicts are all there to extend and fill the canvas. The characters, *Gora*, *Sucharita*, *Binay*, *Lalita*, *Paresh Babu*, *Anandamoyee*, discuss them threadbare, not as intellectual pastimes but as occupations of life. Here is charity and a high degree of intellectuality hitherto unknown to Bengali literature. While the characters are talking away, their psychological situation develops till we find them emotionally committed to one another. The slow seeping of emotions to demolish the structure of thought is one of Tagore's specialities. His instinct for the emotional disposition of love is unerring. If its concluding stage ends in the female's self-prompted sacrifice in the higher interests of the male, the early stages receive the full attention of his genius. For sheer delicacy of conduct and purity of sentiments there is nothing to compare with the bashful, jasmine-stalks of Tagore's maidens. Passion Tagore abjured after delineating *Binodini* in *Chokher Bali*; only once in the cave-scene of *Chaturanga*

is the dark, 'aboriginal onrush of the beast' mentioned; he removed all the dross from love, overlaid it with all manner of *rasa*, as in *Shesher Kabita*; he suggested sex only thrice, twice in *Jogajog* and once in *Ghare-Baire*, but each case was meant to show the brute, in Madhusudan and Sandeep. Still, the silent adoration of Behari for Asha in *Chokher Bali*, the unconscious attraction of Gora for Sucharita in *Gora*, the unobtrusive loyalty of Sreebilash to Damini in *Chaturanga*, the wilful liquidation of Kitty in *Shesher Kabita* are sufficient compensation in terms of artistry. These characters, however, are not left to float in their gossamer relations. Tagore had once written an essay—*Kabye Upkshita* (The Neglected in Literature) and given a masterly analysis of the occasional characters like Urmila in the *Ramayana*, Anashua and Priyambada in *Shakuntala* and Patralekha in *Kumbhari*. Tagore loved the subsidiaries of life's stories and gave them life by a few deft touches. These living occasionals give a new dimension to Tagore's novels. Without these Martha's, his Mary's do not shine.

In illustration of the psychological development, the case of Sacheesh in *Chaturanga* (English Trans: "Broken Ties") may be analysed. We see him first as an ardent disciple of his uncle Jagmohan, a brilliant characterisation of the positivist-humanist, a type that was prevalent in the Bengal of the latter half of the XIX century. The uncle had brought up a girl Nanibala who loved a rake and bore his child. Not all the care and persuasion of the uncle could dissuade this young woman from continuing to love him. When she

dies by her own hand, Sacheesh begins to question the intellectualism in the idea of 'service to humanity' held by the uncle. At his death, Sacheesh swings over to the opposite pole and forgets himself in a personal devotion to his *guru*, Swami Leelananda. Now it is *rasa* that will fulfill him. But two things happen. There is a young wilful widow, Damini, in the ashram, whose claim to its membership is not strong. She is not particularly devoted to the Guru who is the usual type believing more in increasing the number of his followers than in their spiritual uplift. Damini has seen through his materialism and spies Sacheesh. The woman's love for the concrete, the personal Sacheesh grows while Sacheesh pushes on to his quest for selfhood till Damini throws herself at Sacheesh's feet in a cave at night. Sacheesh kicks her away. This abandon of Damini and a minor incident in the life of an occasional character, another inmate of the ashram, raise doubts about the limitations of the capacity of *rasa* to integrate the human soul by itself. Sacheesh leaves Damini. Damini is given by him in marriage to Sreebilas, another secondary inmate of the ashram, but one who is of the same order of Damini. Damini dies, Sreebilas is perturbed, Sacheesh lives on, a richer and a quieter man. Every important character in his beautiful book becomes a person. It all looks spiritual ; in a sense, it is ; but then, it is not the cerebral novel we know of in other literatures ; it is very real in the drive of an urge which Tagore believed to be the only urge, and which, Tagore, in the usual manner of self-identification, selected to be the urge in

the life of his hero. It does also appear to be somewhat selfish or self-regarding on the part of Sacheesh, but Damini, on her part, realises herself. We are not sure if it is the womanly way to cherish a spurning, with a kick to boot, but Tagore's view about the woman's part in relation to the man is to release him, thereby realising herself. The torn page of the Upanishad which flew at the Maharshi contained the line '*tyaktena-bhunjitha*,' enjoyment through sacrifice. It may or may not be a middle-class notion, it is certainly not a comradely one. But then it is there, not only in *Chaturanga*, but in all the novels of Tagore. (And naturally, of Sarat Chandra Chatterji's too). Once we accept it as a premiss, *Chaturanga* is a work of art without blemish. Its compactness, its tensions, its unity of design make it undoubtedly the best novel of Tagore. He would write a more brilliant one, *Shesher Kabita*, with its glittering dialogue between sophisticated individuals and its marvellous diction, but here, in *Chaturanga*, there is no looseness, no rhetoric, no touch of the miracle-man, the magician-artificer, anywhere.

We have departed from our method of dealing with the totality of Tagore's works and avoiding analysis of the particular. But the temptation was irresistible. Let us come back. Tagore's novels have certain common features which mark them off from those of Bankim Chandra Chatterji. The latter was a path-finder and a first-class intellect that had absorbed the then current thought of England. His grounding in Indian thought was weak at first; when it was surer, even then he did

not possess the alchemy by which the romantic attitude, the strong note individualism, the radical fervour, and the positivist rationalism which he had imbibed from English literature could be compounded with his otherwise classical mental structure, his knowledge of the Hindu society and its obligations. It ended in his plea for a neo-Hindu resurgence. Like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim the artist remained a divided being. Tagore was more lucky. His saturation with Indian traditions was deeper; hence, he could more easily assimilate a bigger dose of Western thought. (He was an extraordinarily 'well-read' man).

Along with the difference in the mental make-up, there was the fact that in the nineties the social issues had become comparatively fixed. Tagore's first two novels were written under the shadow of Bankim Chandra, but soon after he was free to deal with the problems that he knew. In no sense can Bankim's novels be called problematic or intellectual, but Tagore's novels definitely are. It is not suggested that Bankim was not aware of the problems; that charge cannot be levelled against one who indicated the unrootedness of the new educated and professional middle class, who emphasised the utter need of the mother-tongue for national growth, who pleaded for the rights of tenants and for equality. All that he did and much more in his remarkable essays. His novels, however, do not betray these beliefs. Tagore's do, not realistically, but intellectually. This advance was due to the maturity of the problems raised by the British rule. If Bankim's nationalism led to Bande

Mataram and the vapourings of *Anand Math*, Tagore's nationalism led him to recognise its contradictions and to *Viswa-bodh* (a feeling of the universe), equally vague if you like, yet a step ahead. India had been linked up with the world for good or bad by the first quarter of this century. Similarly, whereas Saibalini's (in Bankim Chandra's *Chandrasekhar*) departure from the social norm of the Hindu female was just a faint glimmer of the woman's right to love and choose, Binodini's (*Chokher Bali*), was a more conscious revolt. Still, Binodini the widow's rejection of Bihari's offer of marriage was on the plea of Hindu customs. From Binodini to Binu (*Palataka*) and the wife (in the famous *Wife's Letter*—a story in the *Sabuj Patra*), from Kamala (*Nauka Dubi*) to Sucharita (*Gora*), Damini (*Chatu-ranga*), Labanya (*Shesher Kabita*) and Ela (*Char Adhyaya*), it is an evolution into the type of woman that we find to-day, among the upper middle classes at least, deeply concerned about the rights of her personality. These rights also include the physical, *e.g.*, Kumudini's revulsion at Madhusudan's approaches, in *Jogajog*. Unfortunately, this consciousness of Tagore's women is familial, not exactly social, in the larger sense of the term. They do not know their role in the making of India. They remain ignorant of the fact that they belong to the same spurious class as those whom they love, that they are one with them in being parasitical. Naturally, they talk and act as is worthy of a separate species (of the same genus), the female, whose part in the affairs of spirit is the converse of their part in the biological, *viz.*, to cast the seed in

order that the male may conceive in ease. The charge is not against Tagore's females as such. It also sticks to the males. Otherwise, *Gora* could have been de-classed instead of being uncovered as an Irish changeling, Sachish could have tried handling the social content to stabilise once for all his thirst for *rupa* when intellect and *rasa* had failed consecutively. At least, Amit Ray (*Sesher Kabita*) could have been a fashionable Communist; he had nearly all the qualifications, including a foreign tour, a long purse and plenty of impulse, an ignorance of Economics and an innocence about Indian culture. Tagore's times, we must not forget, were later; the undifferentiated middle class of Bankim had become differentiated from the rest of society. But in the later periods of Tagore, the middle class became mobile. The more mobile it was getting, the upper the stratum and the more sophisticated the attitudes that Tagore began to take for his province. The style of his novels also became less simple, and occasionally twisted for the pleasure of virtuosity. Contrasted with this, the style of his stories and his poems was becoming simpler, more direct and incisive. This only confirms the view mentioned before that Tagore was not quite a 'professional' novelist.

Though Tagore's latest volume of short stories (*Tecn Sangi*—Three Companions) bears unmistakable signs of the *Sesher Kabita* style and content, yet the second story, *Shesh Katha* opens with all the artistry of the earlier Tagore. [Tagore the story-writer is a master-craftsman. The beginning, the middle and the end are clearly conceived. (There are exceptions, no doubt.) Almost every

story has a plot. The style is one of narration, and never errs on the side of over-statement. And the contents, particularly of the pre-Sabuj Patra stories, range from the village post-master and the poor private tutor to the dying aristocrat. The variety of his village characters is simply bewildering. He knew the petty bourgeoisie through and through. Of course, it was in their humanity that he was interested. Still, nobody who has read his stories can accuse him of class-leanings. Who else introduced the de-classed in our literature? It was Gorki who said that all Russian stories came out of Gogol's 'Cloak'; similarly, nearly all Bengali stories, excepting those of Pramatha Chowdhury and a few moderns, have come out of the matrices hidden in Tagore's 'toga.'

These matrices are quite a number. Some centre in moods, sentiments and atmosphere, others emphasise character and temperaments, and a third group deal with problems. The first two engaged him for about twelve years round about the nineties of the last century, and the third the second decade of this. In those days Tagore would frequently visit his estates in North Bengal and spend months in the house-boat on the Padma and its tributaries. The strong feeling for nature, the concern with the commonplaces of day to day life in villages, and the sudden revelation of humanity in the least expected of situations and the most neglected of creatures mark the stories of this period. His creative soul was then responding to the call of the Real, rather than to that of the Supreme Person, and hence, probably, there was

more of 'realism' in these stories. The stories of atmosphere, e.g., *Hungry Stones*, *At Night*, *The Skeleton*, are of a different genre. They are not macabre, nor are they tales of horror and mystery. The ordinary human element still remains the axis to turn the supernatural round itself. Other stories of this type, (*Secret Wealth*, *Transferred Property*) take off the weirdness by the dexterity in plot-weaving and a matter-of-fact style. There are instances of penetrating psycho-analysis (*Living and Dead*, *Manihara*). That great story '*Nashla neerh*' ends this epoch and begins the new one. It registers an important crisis in every sense; it starts the problem-story in Bengali literature. *Wife's Letter*, *Number One*, *Patro O Patri Na-manjur*, and *The Uncle* (the first part of *Chaturanga*) are a class apart from such stories as *Megh O Rudra*, *Rashmoni's Son*, *Didi*, *Post Master*, *The Teacher*, *Kabuli-walla*, etc. The new ones are essentially problematic and intellectual. We miss that old union with nature, that type of the lovable occasional character and that emergence of human significance out of the trifling. Now it is not so much love as understanding, not the reality of living as the process of growth, not acceptance but refusal, i.e. to say, now it is a new note of protest against the injustice of abstractions and institutions on the ground of personality. 'Contrast *Bicharak* (The Judge) with *Wife's Letter*, and the newness becomes evident. It was certainly another reflection of the crisis brought about by his deeper understanding of the world situation as evidenced in different ways in *Balaka*, *Personality*, *Creative*

T A G O R E

Unity, Gora and Gahre-Bahire, etc.

Two remarks must needs be made before this section is closed. It is not proper to consider Tagore's stories as essentially lyrical. For aught we know, the best European and American stories of the thirties are also lyrical. Mr. H. E. Bates, a competent worker and critic in the field, writes thus about the future of the short story. "But the vitality of its progress will depend then, as always, on its courage in scaling what Miss Elizabeth Bowen calls 'peaks of common experience' and of moving 'past an altitude line to poetry.'" In other words, all good short stories, in their selective economy of materials, the unity of design and mood, the swift onrush of sentiment and the dominance of one temper, are, so to say, poetical. But poetry is not the same thing as lyric verse, nor is Tagore's poetry identical with the lyrical.

The second remark is of a more general nature. Tagore's stories, it is our conviction, belong to the order of the best French and Russian ones. But there is a vital difference. The Russian classics have a candour of the soul, the French have a candour of the mind, and Tagore's have a candour of feeling. If we are ashamed of feeling, Tagore's stories are not for us. If we have no such obsession, they are with the best in the world.

DRAMA AND MUSIC

IF we reduce Drama to the conflict of characters then Tagore's genius cannot be called dramatic—so runs an opinion. But then, we will have to exclude *Raja O Rani* (King and the Queen), *Bisarjan* (Sacrifice), *Malini*, *Grihaprabes*, *Sodh-both* as well as a number of brilliant comedies like the *Goray Galad*, *Chira Kumar Sabha*, (Bachelors' Club) *Baikunther Khata* and certain one-act pieces in *Hasya-Kautuk*. These have nearly all the elements of the drama as we Indians have been taught to recognise. All of them, except the neglected *Malini*, still draw big houses. Again, *Post Office* and the *Raja* are frequently played by the high-brow among the amateur dramatic clubs. So long there is a girl who can squeak and twist her arms, *Nateer Puja* must be played in the towns of Bengal. In addition, the dramatic verse dialogues, like *Gandharir Abedan*, *Kach O Devjani*, and particularly *Lakshmir Pareeksha* are the usual repertoire of the students. Besides, the *Falguni*, *Achalayatan*, *Saradotsab*, *Raja*, *Muktadhara* (Water-fall) and *Rakta-Karabi* have all been brilliantly played by the Shantiniketan group.

TAGORE

In view of these considerations, Tagore's dramas have to be judged anew. The novels were surveyed and reviewed on the principles of European drama because India had had no antecedents in novel writing as such, and whatever Bengal had in Banimati's novels was decidedly English in structure and attitude. But the case of drama is different. It was there in Bengal in a highly developed form, and it is still there in more vital forms in the practices of the people. In light of their existence being profound among Tagore's countrymen, we are apt to think that the terms used by them about Tagore's later dramas, e.g., their 'symbolic quality,' 'symbolism,' 'mysticism,' are never really far distant from the text-books on the history of English literature. Of course, Tagore was familiar with the text in the West; he had translated one of Shakespeare's plays when he was a school boy; he knew Mr. Maeterlinck, Hawthorne and Yeats, (Synge probably), but he was also familiar with the dramatic traditions in Sanskrit, with *Tattva* and *Kathakata* and other village plays of Bengal. In fact, he wrote that he modelled his first musical drama, *Balmiki Pratibha*, on the style of *Kathakata*, with all song, recite and act stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. And it was in this very drama that he introduced certain European airs to suit the action (The Robt's songs, for example). It may be new to the "English-educated," but it is a fact that the so-called mystical remarks of characters like Thakurdas, Dada Thakur, Baul or Sardar, the Mad Man, etc. (they are all one), who must need be present in all the 'non-dramatic'

dramas of Tagore, are the semi-esoteric phrases still being actually spoken by Indian saints, known and unknown. There is nothing of strangeness about them except their unfamiliarity to modern ears. When Synge and O'Casey use them we hear the Irish soil singing ; if Tagore uses them, we must call them mystical and symbolical. Traditional directness has become completely foreign to us.

One of the clues to Tagore's earlier dramas, the consideration of which on the earlier European model is permissible, is offered by the spoken verse of the dialogue. Tagore was using the blank-verse and teaching it to speak better. What with Michael Madhusudan's and Dinabandhu Mitter's verse-dramas and the poetical forms of the people's dramas, it was not quite an innovation. (Tagore seemed to have remained oblivious of the dramas of Girish Chandra Ghose and the metrical forms he had used in his mythological plays.) On the other hand, Tagore could not but realise that the verse-form alone could have a wide appeal, and not the prose of the prose-dramas of the first two writers, e.g., *Neel Darpan* and *Ekai ki Bale Sabhyata*. (Is this Civilisation ?) which only commanded the limited allegiance of the educated. The very semi-historical characters of Tagore's dramas demanded poetry to support their dignity, sentiments and feelings and the slow tempo of their royal action. Thus we find Tagore using flexible, dramatic verse in *Balmiki Prativa*, *Mayar Khela*, *Prakritir Pratisodh*, *Raja O Rani*, *Bisarjan* and *Malini*—in fact all the earlier pieces. Occasionally, poetry would yield to music, as in *Mayar Khela*, but by and large it remained the dominant

form. In no case, as a unit, did the poetic drama suffer because of poetry, the vehicle deliberately chosen.

Another clue, which is particularly proper to the dramas beginning with *Saratotsab* and ending in *Balguni*, written more or less in consecutive years, is to be found in one pregnant sentence of Tagore in a Bengali article, 'My Religion.' After stating that the theme of all these dramas is one, he writes : 'The soul's expression is Joy, for which he (man) can accept Sorrow and Death ; he who avoids the path of Sorrow in fear or laziness or doubt is denied that Joy in this world.' It is a definite reiteration of his rejection of the cult of beauty. (cf. his poem *Ebar phirao more...* 'Turn me now away'). What is more, it does unfold the nature of the conflict that Tagore understood—on the one hand, the fact of the assertion of the soul to express itself in joy by virtue of its nature, and on the other, the facts of sorrow, the states of fear, doubt and indifference. A second conflict runs across the first ; the closure of man's senses by man's own injunctions and appetites *versus* the urge of Nature through the call of Seasons to open the senses in order that men may meet one another more intimately. When the two conflicts are managed well, the drama becomes eminently playable. *The Post Office* is the best example of this excellent carpentry. With these clues we can understand why there must be a young boy (Amal) or girl (Aparna) in nearly all the dramas, right from *Pratikir Parisod* to his last plays, why there cannot but be a rebel or an old man (Dhananjaya preaching non-co-operation, no-rent campaign and civil resistance,

Thakurdada, Dada-Thakur, Baul) whose boon companions are the children and the young, why the seasons, particularly, the rains, autumn and spring, burst forth and splash colour all over the plays, and the moon or the sun rises at the end, and why death has no terror in Tagore's dramas.

We do not suggest that these two clues can disburden us of the responsibility for ascertaining the appropriateness of the means adopted. On many occasions we find that the feelings have no 'objective correlates.' The characters do, no doubt, talk in Tagore's language, but the question may be asked in what other language but Shakespeare's did the Fool and the Grave-digger speak? Still, the wisdom of the talkers is not always bent to the needs of the drama. And then, we feel sometimes that the conflict is not being left to us to resolve and that Tagore has assumed our task. In the plays of mood, suggestion is the thing, as in the *Cherry Orchard*, or the *Blue Bird*, or the *Sunken Bell*. But why should some character in Tagore's dramas take up upon himself to give us the thread, and a thick one at that? Probably, Tagore was not certain of his audience; it may also be that he had been over-conditioned to believe that he was the Poet and the Prophet; it is also likely that his conception of art was partly didactic, *pace* his own statements to the contrary. In any case, he was always changing the names of his dramas, recasting them, not always for the better, and adding new songs, not every time with reason. Sensitive man that he was, he was, possibly, driven to doubt his genius by his critics who pronounced

the dramas as undramatic. But we feel that he could well reply that poetry was the mother of Drama, that the unity of the mood transcended the diversity of relations among characters, that the reality of feeling *per se* was not of an inferior order to that of emotion *per capita*. That he did not say all this and much more in his inimitable way is a loss to dramatic criticism. If he did say it, it was in an apologetic manner. Tagore was kept on the defensive by our philistines. One more minor criticism ; some of the speeches of the later dramas, like 'Red Oleanders' read to-day like pamphleteering on the stage. It is social consciousness obtruding itself upon the unity of design. The difference between *Nateer Puja*, and *Chandalika* or *Achalayatan* should make this point clear. This problem of untouchability was close to his heart, and he had tackled it in a number of his works. But in *Achalayatan* and *Chandalika*, it loomed so large that the artistry was diminished. The relation between Panchak and Mahapanchak, one a rebel and the other the spirit incarnate of conservation, pales by the side of Panchak's advocacy of the untouchable's case. No wonder that the Hindus so violently re-acted. Their reaction was re-inforced by the failure in workmanship. The fact of the matter appears to be this : In his dramas, there are two levels ; one, that of the people, where the language is simple, responses the stock ones and the technique of presentation fairly firm, and the other, that of ideas of which the language is poetry, the interactions subtle, and the presentation sophisticated. Joining them are certain agencies like the simple humanity of the child and the

young and of the vagabond, and above all, nature, which is a definite character in Tagore's dramas. When the audience are lost between the two levels the connection is missed and the play becomes 'mystical.' In a sense, it is the defect of the audience, in another, it is traceable to Tagore's uncertain traffic between the two levels. He was too civilised to throw sophistication to the wind and commit himself to the rural forms of the drama. We almost think that if he had not been compelled to take his troupe out and only confined himself to the open air of Shantiniketan, he would have done it. Then we would have had Eurhythmics at its best.

One very important secret of the hold of his dramas over those who have seen them performed by the Shantiniketan parties was the stage-craft. The author did not see the pre-Shantiniketan performances. The records are ecstatic, but they lack details. The Shantiniketan shows, at Shantiniketan, in Calcutta and other cities, were works of art. Tagore's own contribution was to the conception and the rehearsals, Nandalal Bose and Suren Kar saw to the design and the execution, while Mrs. Pratima Tagore was in charge of dress. In Calcutta, Gaganendranath and Abanindranath actively collaborated in production and acting. And so did Mani Ganguly, Sukumar Roy, Asit Haldar, and many more. Tagore himself acted; once he took half a dozen parts, and the author has seen him in three after a month's strenuous supervision and tuition in rehearsals. The stage-craft was a combination of the natural with the symbolic. Thus, to convey the atmosphere of a cottage, the thatched

verandah would have bamboo poles, the dried grass, the creeper, the beaver-bird's nest, and the typical rural hangers for the coloured earthen pots. There would also be *alpana* (women's decorations with rice-paste) on the floor and one or two Kalighat 'pats' (pictures). But then, an ordinary character would appear in the dress of by-gone days, with head-dress and a *fatua* and wooden sandals, (the curd-seller did once appear in scarlet Benares silk in *The Post Office*), a prince would stalk in gorgeous array, yet with a general historical conformity, light would effulge or fade, colours of saris would burst, and some symbol would be placed at the corner to pull naturalism out of its ruts of familiarity. And then the music, a song in solo, a flute with its plaintive note or the *esraj* (*dilruba*) with its melancholia would streak its way through. That was one type. Another was of *Falguni* and *Tasher Desh* (The Country of Cards). Their production was simple and symbolic, with the minimum of stage-properties. (Probably 'symbolism is not the word. Tagore, in his Poetry too, evoked images more than he created symbols.) Naturalism was not rejected, it only quietly receded. In *Saradotsab* and *Falguni*, the stage was kept free for the boys and girls to romp about, with no artificial proscenium, no false impedimenta to hamper them. The impression of open air was effectively created. In Tagore-productions, space was the main thing. If walls were necessary, screens (not cut or painted scenes) would do. The most flashing dresses usually were patched up odds and ends used by the poor people, and they cost very little indeed. When Tagore

entered, say, as the Blind Baul with the single-stringed instrument used by the peripatetic singers of India's countryside, light played on him in a way that made him look still taller and the stage larger. His dress was just a toga. The composition was triangular. Similar effect was created in *Chitrangada* when Tagore sat in white silk before the footlight in one extreme corner reciting the Vedic mantrams when Arjuna met Chitrangada in wedlock. Tagore was the father of the modern Indian stage-craft.

From drama to music should be an easy step for one who writes on Tagore. In fact, the two are inseparably linked in him. The boy Tagore was composing words for melodies at the behest of his elder brother; the young Tagore wrote the two musical dramas *Balmiki Prativa* and *Mayar Khela* in which he sang and acted; the adult Tagore was always singing, in drawing-rooms, in parties and conferences. He set the first tune to *Bande Mataram* and sang it. His first poems were called *Sandhya Sangeet*, *Prabhat Sangeet*, *Saisab Sangeet*, and the first collection of songs, *Rabicchhaya*, was published in 1884. About 2,000 songs are credited to him. He used to say that he was never so happy as when he was composing songs, and that he would be, and would like to be, known as a maker of songs, the Baul. So does Dr. Abanindranath, his nephew, think. Who can speak better on art and on Tagore and on Tagore's art? On the other hand, his dramas are full of songs, some are only songs and nothing else. There is a deeper connection between Tagore the composer and Tagore the dramatist than what appears on the surface.

Poetry certainly, but it is not poetry merely. Tagore's musical compositions cannot but help the drama because of the very nature and nurture of his genius.

The nurture first. When by the eighties of the last century the musicians came out of their sheltered existence in the feudal Durbars, they were received in the courts which the new rich were seeking to establish. Calcutta was then the cosmopolis and attracted both the new rich and the experts of the country. Bengal had a faint tinkle of Hindustani Music, the Bishunpur style. The two Tagore families became the centres of revival in music. In Rabindranath's own family *ustads* were maintained for the benefit of the younger members and also for the devotional needs of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. Regular instruction in music, the monotonous meaningless minutiae of which we know only too well, was not well-received by any of the Tagore boys and girls. European music was also popular in the family. The result was an education in the musical sense rather than in grammar. Room was thus left for experiments. That eternal truant began to discover himself in the newly found freedom. Tagore's musical sense was sharp without his knowledge of music being technically accurate. Throughout his life, he retained his love for the classical Indian music, both Hindustani and Karnatic. He was also one of the born listeners. Peace would well out of him. It was the closest approximation to *dhyana*.

The saturation with the traditional style worked itself out in many ways. Dhrupad, with its four movements, its straight dignity, its simple and large rhythms, its

insistence on the purity of pronunciation and the worth of sentiments, and at least, two of its peculiar *almakars viz., mid and gamak* (the slow glide and the abrupt jump with deep breath), and a number of appropriate *tāls* (rhythms), e.g., *Chantal, Jhaptal, Teora* mainly, fixed the structure of Tagore's earlier compositions. His religious songs and choruses were almost invariably Dhrupadic, which was only in the fitness of things. Some of his later compositions also bear unmistakable signs of Dhrupad. Secondly, the melodies he selected were mainly the classical ones, as in the Bishnupur style. Some of them to-day have become rare and a research student in music could do nothing better for rescuing the rare ones from oblivion than to search among the old notations of Tagore's songs. But, usually, these melodies were about fifty, which is about the number used by the experts. Thirdly, he generally accepted the time-theory of classical music by which a group of Ragas would be assigned to a fixed period of day and night. The main seasonal assignment he also followed. Thus the Mallar types for the rains, Basant and its analogues, Kafi, Sindura, etc., for spring, came to him easily. Here too, it was free orthodoxy. Fourthly, *tankartab, batwara* and other decorations of Kheyal, and the almost physical illustrativeness of Thumri in the name of expression, he avoided. (Master artists of those days never used them. Even to-day, in their austere moments, they reject them.) This, however, is only the general influence of classical music on Tagore. It should not lead one to suppose that he was a child in the arms of the *Ustad*. Songs of departure and revolt appeared

early in the day. In *Balmiki Prativa* and *Mayar Khela* he introduced Irish melodies and re-formed Hindustani melodies for the sake of dramatic action. To certain set compositions of the Sitar (stringed instrument) also words were set. Though his East-West synthesis in music came off not badly, he was never happy with it. The experiment with instrumental compositions was a success. But he left it. Tagore rejected that bastard instrument, the harmonium, very early. The Veena he loved most, but *Veenkars* were not available, and he made use of *Esraj* (*Dilruba*), an effeminate instrument, for accompaniment. Sarangi, the perfect one for the purpose, was as yet taboo for its associations.

Soon it appeared that the fixed modes of Ragas and Raginis were not enough. The urge was common to his poetry, his dramas, his novels, his short stories no less than to his political and sociological essays. They all betray breaches in his earlier faith, a search for things outside and an expansion of his personality. His consciousness was growing out of its cocoon. It was recognising the world outside. We see the result best in music. He started by blending the Ragas and giving them new content. In all, about thirty or forty new Raginis and a thousand songs were the consequence. Naturally, the *Ustads* and the 'interested' in music called them 'mixtures.' But they were new; not only new, but in their newness they obeyed exactly the same principles of creation which the great musicians had adopted and the public accepted. The only difference was that Tagore was an outsider, that he was living, and

that his words were not the gibberish used by the *Ustads* in their *tans*. Tagore's compositions of this stage repeat the course of the development of Indian classical music.

Those thirty or forty new Raginis can be grouped under a number of heads. In the Todi group, Tagore's blendings are the following : Asawari-Bhairavi, Jaunpuri-Bhairavi, Darbari-Todi-Jaunpuri or Desi-Bhairavi, Khat-Todi and Todi-Ramkeli. The Bhairom group consists of Ramkeli-Bhairom, Anand-Bhairom, Kalangra-Bhairom, Bhariom-Bhairavi. His metier was Bhairavi, and not a single morning song escaped its influence. Space forbids the analysis of Tagore's Bhairavi varieties which are about a dozen. As in Bilawal, so in Sarang there are many songs no doubt, but he is not free with them. The usual Brindabani, Madhumad and Gaud are there, the only exception being his blending of Brindabani Sarang with Megh. Pilu and Baroan attracted him, but he does not distinguish between them. All his Pilu-Baroan songs are in the light mood with light *tals*, chiefly Kashmiri Khemta (!) and Kaharva, *tals* used by the cheaper women of the town and by the village-folk in their private ceremonies. Multani is another of Tagore's favourites. Its mixtures are three : Multani-Bhimpalasi, Multani-Purabi, and Multani-Todi. And here we see very clearly Tagore's principles of blending. Multani is the raga that leads Purabi and Bhimpalasi in the time-scale, the sentiments being similar, the sadness of the falling day and the twilight. In the country-songs of Bengal, no distinction is still made between Multani and Bhimpalasi. Todi and Multani have three common *bikrit* notes, re, gā and

dhā, and unless due care is taken the two 'ragas' sound as one. Tagore seldom offends against the intimacy of sentiments fixed by association; he effects the transition from one mood to another; mixes first the cognate ragas, and then those which have certain marked common notes, even though their arrangements of notes are dissimilar. This is exactly how the famous composers had worked. On what other principles were Deshi-Todi, Iman-Kalyan. Kafi-Sindhu, Gaud-Mallar, Desh-Mallar, Surat-Mallar, Jhinjit-Khambaj, Bihag-Khambaj, Bhairon-Bahar, Basant-Bahar, and a host of others created? What else is Adana but Sarang-Kanada, Shankara but Bihag-Kalyan? Really, after Tansen and Darwin, to hold the contrary view is a bit stupid. The dominant evening groups are Kalyan, Kedara, Basant and Bihag. Kalyan varieties are not many; they go with Purabi and Bhoopali mainly. Kedara is beautifully blended with Chhayana, Hambir, Khambaj, Shyam and Bihag. Bihag in its turn goes with Khambaj, and Shankara, and Basant with Sohini, Hindol, Paraj. Bahar and Lalit. The Kanada variations he does not improve upon, as already we have had eighteen of them. Probably, Tagore did not care for Bagesri; there appears to be only one song in that raga which is known to the author. Malkaus he positively avoided. Tagore, however, seems to have reserved his genius for Mallar, the melody of the rains. Twelve varieties are alleged to be extant, but Tagore simply pours himself out in Mallar. The rainy season he liked above all. Like the Emperors of India he would come back to his psychic capital, Shantiniketan, where the rains come in all their royal splendour over the

spaces, force themselves into the ashram, and give it the fulness of life. Shantiniketan for the rains; in summer, the soil is in the grip of skeleton-hands; after the cloud-burst, the little rills become roaring torrents, the *ketaki* is in bloom, and there is merriment all round. (Only the snakes come out—but as Tagore once said: ‘Has anybody here died of snake-bite?’ None, indeed. Twice-bitten, but not even once dead. But, the outsiders ?) . . .

Tagore’s Mallars refuse to be analysed. They pass from the grave to the gay,—Mallar with Kafi, Kanada, Desh, Surat, Pilu-Baroan and so on,—Tagore would be on the point of recklessness. But then, as structures, his rain-songs do not go beyond the matrix of Megh. Two other ragas which do not exactly come within the time-sequence are frequently used by him, Khambaj and Kafi. In the classical system they can be sung at all hours. Khambaj is, of course, a flexible raga, like Tchekhov’s Darling as Tolstoy understood her. Tagore has given us Khambaj-Bihag, Pilu-Khambaj, Khambaj-Chhaya, Gara-Khambaj, Khambaj-Bahar, Khambaj-Kedara, Khambaj-Kafi, to mention some of them only. Kafi has gone with Sindu, Sindhurha, Khambaj, Pilu, and of course with Kanara. (Tagore’s Sahana, like his Bibhas, is wrongly used.) The above list, inexhaustive as it is, mentions much more than forty varieties. But we have written ‘about thirty or forty’ for the simple reason that *at least* thirty blendings, even if they existed as rarities in private repertoires, were probably not known to Tagore, and certainly are not known to most of us. For historical purposes, therefore, they are creations. Of course, every combination is not

a synthesis. In a few later songs, the joints creak.

But Tagore would not halt at the blending of airs. Of rhythms there were at least three new ones, with 9, 11, 13 beats. The author remembers to have attended a meeting held in protest against Tagore's '*Sangceter Mukti*' in which a scholar in music made a woman-vocalist demonstrate that the new *tals* were the old ones in disguise. Nothing much could be proved, Tagore's case going by default. Naturally, Tagore ignored 'public taste', and made bold to go beyond what the public tasted in the classical forms, viz., Dhrupad and Dhamar. The irony of the situation was that the public did not know that Dhrupad and Dhamar, as they are sung to-day, were once the regional styles of Agra, Gwalior and Muttra. Dhamar is called Holi, and its unequal rhythm, which is its beauty, is the rhythm of the local swing-festival. Tagore also, probably was not aware of it. But he had heard the folk-tunes of beggars and boatmen, of wandering saints and singers, and of the common men in their community prayers. These melodies and their simple rhythms now became his allies. After the Barsha-mangal (1921), his compositions became genuine outcastes, the *antyaja* of music. Not that all these combinations of the folk and the classical were immediately pleasant; not that he gave up composing in the classical structure; but that at last he found himself more in tune with the deeper laws of creation. He had repeated in the second phase the history of classical Indian music; in the third phase he did likewise, in addition, he repeated the history of all music, viz., the rejuvenation of types by

cross-breeding with or grafting on the indigenous. At long last, he was obeying the capital laws of all human creation by diving into the collective habits of the people. Whenever Indian music (Western music too) had become stereotyped and stopped from evolving, it had drawn from the life-giving power of the folk and the people's songs. The very names, Bangali, Garjari, Multani, Saurathi, Jaunpuri, Deshi, and many more would prove it beyond doubt in our case. Sanskrit texts even refer to mixtures with Iranian and Turkish tunes. Kirtan, Kawal, Bhajan, in fact, the whole area of *artha-sangeet* is the meeting ground of the *marga* (classical) and the Deshi or *laukik* (folk) styles. When Tagore used the term 'Sangeet,' instead of *raga* or *ragini*, his instinct did not lead him astray.

This search for simple folk-tunes came from the same urge that was responsible for the change-over from the older type to the so-called symbolical dramas like *Falguni*. Poetry offered him a greater resistance, and so the poems from 1920 onwards, with the exceptions of *Purabi*, *Mahua*, *Prabahini* and until he struck upon the prose-poems and free verse, were songs and the songs were poems. Between 1920 and 1932 (*Punascha*), as many as eleven volumes of his songs alone appeared with notation. (Tagore's case was therefore different from that of Yeats who composed words for music. Yeats' musical ears were defective.) But in a sense Tagore had already gone to the people when he took to the prosody of folk-verse and made new things out of them. Be it noted, however, that Tagore's later compositions are not

'folk-songs,' as the later literature is not 'folk-literature.' That is dialectically never possible. The simple and the sophisticated usually ran in two streams, but when the spring-water welled up it was all one running sheet of creation.

What was the urge? Once again, it was primarily of personality. Our ragas, as we find them from the XVI century onward, are too abstract, too non-human, too remote from individual hopes and fears, worries and contentment. In their courtly formality they are like the Indian administration. People who had nothing to do with the court never took kindly to them. They always had their own music, devotional, ceremonial, seasonal, communal, (not in Ramsay MacDonald's sense at all), and occupational. The two interacted no doubt, but in the main, their currencies were different, reflecting quite clearly the class-division in our sacred land. In the *laukik* or *artha-sangeet*, the solo-performer existed, but his improvisations never suppressed community-singing. So, the individual as such seldom got a full chance either in Dhrupad or in the popular songs. Only the peripatetic singer with his songs and words of double meaning, one for the audience and another for the elect of his sect, was somewhat free to express himself in an un-premeditated and a full-throated ease. Hence, Tagore's affinity with him, that of his music with his, his prosody with his.

Tagore's music thus seems to be what it is in its avoidance of the general and abstract nature of the courtly variety of Hindustani music known as *classical* music. The speciality of Tagore's compositions is that they start

from the specific demands of the individual. Of course, they do not stop there. What we find in these songs is a sort of pole fixed in the individual at one end and lost in the music of the spheres at the other. In a way, therefore, Tagore the composer may be treated as a symptom, an Evangelist of Decadence. But then Hindustani music has to be proved to have come from the lips of Brahma, which is just nonsense. At the same time, we cannot fail to notice the uncertainty that comes from a credo in which the individual and the Universe overshadow the intermediate stages which build up the occupational and the community-songs. One has to pay the penalty for passing hurriedly over the intermediate stages in the name of the beginning and the end. And the penalty is implicit in the description of Tagore's music as a separate species, whereas, in reality, it is in the main traditions of the development of music, and of Hindustani music itself so far. Nowhere are the tests of Tagore's greatness proved better than here ; and nowhere too the limiting objective conditions of his greatness.

Once we seize this essential point, *viz.*, Tagore's discontent with the abstract modes and his search for the human, for the individual and the specific, we can easily understand why his songs fill his dramas, why they are sung (mostly badly) and hummed by all manner of people for all sorts of moods. Old men, young men and women, particularly, can and do find the appropriate song for almost every mood in their lives. The more fugitive the mood is, the sweeter the song, the deeper it is, the nobler. Many discerning critics therefore consider his songs to

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be his chief claim upon posterity. Of course, it is the distant posterity; the immediate one may demand more action and more vigour. But then, more varieties have to be found for our modes of living in order that they may lead to the enrichment of Indian music, for example, by adding the occupational or the dramatic dimensions of human motives. Something will have been lost no doubt, but pity for a dying bird's plumage may also be a waste energy.

VI

PAINTING AND DANCE

TWO other facets of Tagore's genius shine on us, painting and dancing. Tagore took to painting quite late in the day, at nearly seventy. It was like a side-issue, a chip from his workshop, a play of his fancy developing out of the inter-linear erasures and corrections in his manuscripts. His ambient hand-writing was large; clear, flowing and balanced. The first attempts were essentially calligraphic. But soon the 'graphs' came out with hints of design. When Tagore found that order was issuing without his willing it, he changed over from the pointed nib and black ink to the back of the nib and then to brush and colour. In this process too he seemed to have been 'aiding the birth' of form or 'salvaging.' The forms were varied: flowers, trees, landscapes, heads, human figures, and creatures of his private myth. They were firm with the strength of bones, even though anatomy was not always observed. Colours also ranged from gloomy tones to bright splashes. But all appeared to be unfinished. Sketches they could not be properly called. They were the 'work in progress' of one who was seeking

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to strike a new vein in the process of creation. The emergence was not complete, the baby came there with the placenta and the umbilical cord, the hand still held the brush and the bottles of pigments. It is this 'incompleteness' which is the secret of the 'old man's play.'

The true nature of Tagore's paintings may be understood by stating what they are not. (1) They are not 'the automatic writings' of the surrealists. Tagore's own introduction and other remarks laid stress on this automatic process of the guided hand. But certainly, Tagore's paintings are definitely a class apart from those of Joan Miró, Chirico or Chagall of the older brand or of Max Ernst and Salvador Dali of the newer one of surrealists. With no stage of Pablo Picasso can any parallel be drawn. The surrealists (both types) have certain common features, e.g., the pictorial and literary collage of juxtaposed fragments, an anecdotal character, and the 'automatic' association of dreams. Salvador Dali who amended Pierre Roy's and Chirico's collage procedure described his 'irrational' art as 'paranoiac criticism,' a kind of exteriorisation by 'symbolical recording of subconscious obsessions, fetishes and hallucinations.' None of these features, except the automatic guidance, are present in Tagore's paintings. Technically, if we forget Tagore's own comments thereupon, the paintings are 'rational.' If outside guidance be a test of the irrational, then the *Jiban-debata* poems of Tagore are no better and no worse.

(2) They are not the 'modern primitives' of post-war Europe inspired as they are by cave-paintings and the Negro art. Tagore's paintings are definitely on the well-

accepted. Western style, and they do not belong even to the Indian art-traditions. It may appear strange that one who with his nephews sponsored the modern movement in Indian art should have nothing to do with it in his own creation, that Tagore, the representative Indian, should strike upon the Western traditions the moment he would allow his hand to move willy-nilly. But then, this contradiction may be partly resolved. Tagore was no doubt dissatisfied with the West in certain aspects, but his attitude towards the Western civilization was not one of hatred breeding frustration and despair. He did believe in the capacity of the West to renew itself. Tagore did not reject the vital traditions of European Art. Therefore, an escape into primitivism was not essential for him. At the same time, the fact is that he did not come to the Indian or the Chinese art, as one would have expected. No other explanation occurs to the author except that in painting he did not draw from the depths of the collective unconscious from where Indian symbols spring and Indian art-forms emerge. His flowers are not the lotus, his human figures are not the angelic, his birds and beasts are not the Jatayu or the Sacrificial Horse. They definitely belong to the fore-conscious or the sub-conscious. Look at the emotive charge of each of his works; his flowers are portraits, his human figures are dark with intent, his blood-red colours are laid layer over layer in almost sadistic vexation; and the whole seems to hover with puckered brows over a precipice. Yes, primitive and automatic in this manner, but not beyond it. Man, nature and the beast are his subjects, but not the angelic or the

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divine prototype. They belong to the Purgatory of his soul, neither to the Inferno nor to the Paradise.

Personally, therefore, the author thinks with M. Rabat that Tagore's drawings and paintings are not 'play'. He takes them as serious work, and on every showing, they pass as good work. The drawings are graceful and quivering with life; the best paintings are simply designed and show some remarkable effects in colour, and the sense of ornament is almost always there. Some of his paintings are happy. The human figures convey the feeling that they have a neck and a backbone, the flowers are dense, the stars and the atmosphere have their earth, a pleasing contrast indeed with much of what goes by the name of Bengali painting. If the poetic equivalents of these pictures are to be discovered they are to be found only or there in his earlier poem, *On the Sea of Pura*, in *Khyabshala*, a book of humorous poems, illustrated by himself, but more deeply in the volume of much later poems known as *Prantik* (*On the Border*). The prose equivalents are *Shay*—a series of fantastic stories illustrated by the author himself, and certain parts of *Gulab-Sulab* (short stories). It is interesting to note that *Shay*, *Khyabshala* and *Prantik* all came out in 1937, after his serious illness. The connection of these poems and his paintings with his struggle with the idea of Death cannot be missed. Tagore was wrestling as it were with the unknown denizens of the deep to have his personality integrated in peace before its merging with the Supreme Person. In the author's opinion, the paintings are tokens of the penultimate

crisis, the last but one reckoning with Death. We do not suggest that it was finally resolved, but we do mean that the paintings are a definite stage in their maker's growth, a marked aspect of his conception of Death. Without that growth and that genius, they could have been interesting ; in their context, they are essential. At all times, some of them at least are eminently satisfying.

Tagore's visual powers were highly developed, only less than the audile ones. We have referred to the lack of tactile feeling and also to the peculiar nature of his dramatic sense. The faculties and inhibitions were combined to produce the Shantiniketan dance. In another book,* the merits and demerits of the Shantiniketan style of dancing have been discussed. Tagore's contributions were the conception of the theme, the songs and the dramatic structure. Occasionally, he would even suggest the details of dance-forms. The earlier dances were deficient in footwork, and were characterised by a close, illustrative dependence upon the verbal contents of the songs. But the main rhythm was observed and the pictorial design respected. Later on, however, things improved when some born dancers were discovered and the sophisticated 'folk-style' of Manipur dance was accepted in an amended form. With their help, the story element came out in all its lyric beauty, and steps and movements were co-ordinated. *Natir Pujah* is probably the best performance of this period. Later, in the dance-version of *Chitrangada*, a synthesis was reached between

* *Vide* author's *Modern Indian Culture* Ch. VII Indian Publishers, Tagore Town, Allahabad.

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the musical, the pictorial and the dramatic. In certain scenes of *Chitrangada* dancing attained self-government. The general weakness of Tagore's dance-forms consists in the neglect of the eyes, the neck, and the hands, in the subservience to Tagore's music, and in their comparative indifference to more than one or two varieties of the soft. But their strong points are their lyric quality, the movement of the arms below the elbow, their pictorial ensemble and the excellence of production, their basic rhythm, and that genuine decency which is the quintessence of culture. It is yet to be seen how Tagore's dance-forms will be borne either by the changes in the derivative arts or by the new, less lyrical, and more vital forms of drama that may arise. In the meanwhile, the dance-forms of his conception remain things of beauty. Sociologically, the removal of the hundred year old taboo against the body is a great gain. It is a restoration of the ancient respect for the human body, an Indian culture-trait that has been almost deliberately ignored so long by the haberdashers of Indian Culture in conspiracy with those middlemen of Victorian virtues who confused self-control with sex-caution to cover their own obsession. (The author's regret is that though puritanism has been avoided, 'puritan' still persists in the name of decency.) Thanks to Tagore, Indian girls have taken to dancing. If they have no training, no sense of rhythm, no music, or if they get married soon, no blame attaches to Tagore. And then, any future construction of dance-forms will have to utilise Tagore's group-formations, even if the movements of the women's arms are to be made

less sinuous. The woman's part in the execution of Tagore's dances has been as good or as bad as it has been in the case of his music. There are no 'reasons of Art' by which Tagore's genius in music and dance may be annexed by only one species, and of only one class at that !

VII

POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL VIEWS

TAGORE'S writings on political and social subjects include national songs, addresses, formal essays and speeches. They would fill a volume or two. His political and social activities, punctuated only by fits of illness and foreign tours, practically filled his whole life. The last address at Shantiniketan, *The Crown of Civilization* in which he raised his objections to India's political subjection to the highest level of human protest, was pathetic in its confession that his nurturing faith in the civilization that Great Britain had brought to India had gone bankrupt. At the same time, barely a couple of years ago, he had sent that famous letter to Yone Noguchi in which he condemned the Japanese aggression in Korea and China in equally certain terms. The reply to Miss Rathbone's appeal to India was composed when he was mortally ill. Earlier, he had left his sickbed to preside at the mass-demonstration in Calcutta held to protest against the repressive policy of the Government in general and the treatment of detainees at Hijli in particular. At

the youthful end, we know of his leadership of the Swadeshi movement, his desperate efforts at introducing the vernacular in political meetings, his initiation of the Rakhibandhan ceremony as a symbol of fraternity between castes and communities, and his earnest attempts to instil life into the decaying villages and to evolve a new educational system more in consonance with the needs and the ideals of the people than the existing soulless one. It is a pity that India has forgotten the man of action in the Poet. In the intermediate stage, he pointed out the limitations of nationalism and pleaded for an international outlook, he protested against the Jalianwallabag massacre and the less dramatic but equally effective policy of internment, and gave up his knighthood in a letter that should live in the history of human freedom. His subsequent travels in Soviet Russia re-oriented many of his earlier views, but, in the main, they only strengthened his deeper convictions. His political and social views can be easily deduced from the discussions of the characters in his novels and stories. His national songs are well-known.

It is obvious that his politics cannot be separated from his other works. Politics, in its turn, is dependent upon his reading of Indian and world-history and is closely linked with his view of society. It comes out of his personalistic humanism to become democratic personalism. Tagore at first considered that the chief function of Indian history was to convey to the world the message of a forest-laboratory in which experiments in social harmony had been quietly conducted.

Gradually, the content of his notion of Indian history increased to a perception of its main course through balanced groups in towns and villages. The role of cities as such was missing. Still later, the course was sought to be understood in terms of State-power on the one hand and a disintegrated social order on the other. The Muslim period was only the rule of an alien ruler, and not of the alien nation that had institutionalised itself into a soulless administration. For him, the British rule had once brought the gifts of the West, its science, humanism, vigour, self-help, literature, and love of freedom, but in the later phases, those gifts had been turned into ashes by the cult of power, a non-human administration of law and order. The course of world-history for him, as he began to see it on the eve of the World War I was one of greed, exclusiveness in the name of nationalism, lust of power by the State, ending in a worship of the machine that forgot its function to serve man and usurped man's mastery. Tagore called this imperialism. His reading of world-history was partly amended by his visit to Soviet Russia where he saw the various nationalities working smoothly as autonomous entities with their own culture flowering within the larger ambit of a democratic socialist constitution. The remark of a Korean youth that the exploited of all nations have a strength superior to the might of the exploiter made a deep impression on him. Tagore recognised the link between India and the world and the utter need of strengthening it. But he did not realise that the existing relation was based, primarily, on the economic foundation of the exploiter-

exploited relations within the capitalist structure of the nation-state, and secondarily, upon the expansionist consequences thereof. Tagore's conception of history was therefore effective as a protest, but it did not offer ways and means of remaking it beyond those of love, dignified suffering and rural reconstruction, of *chittàsuddhi* and *prayschitta*, i.e., self-purification and atonement. His technique he propounded through the lips of Dhananjaya, the saintly rebel of his drama, *Prayschitta* (1909). He suggested almost everything—Satyagraha, no-rent campaign, moral preparation, removal of untochability etc., with which we were to get familiar later. There is something in Dunne's theory of Time, it seems. Be that as it may, Tagore's idea, Gandhiji's likewise, of regeneration through love and suffering is different from that of another man who changed the history of his country in our life-time and of whom another writer, Gorky, said, "I have never met in Russia, the country where the inevitability of suffering is preached as a general road to salvation, . . . one who hated, loathed and despised all unhappiness, grief and suffering so strongly and deeply as Lenin did. He was particularly great in my opinion precisely because of his burning faith that suffering was not an essential and unavoidable part of life, but an abomination that people ought and could sweep away." Tagore's ways and means did not include hatred of suffering. Gandhiji's also do not. East and West ?

Tagore's view of Indian society was that it was primarily rural. The village communities once had a harmony of their own. (With his ideas he could not hold with many

Indian sociologists that the caste-system was the backbone of the Indian society.) In those 'little republics' of our Indologists, the interests balanced one another, with the panchayat as the unobtrusive regulator and under the benevolent guiding hand of the zamindar. When the village-communities were disrupted, how exactly Tagore was not anxious to explain, Indian society became limp. the upper castes drifted from the lower, and the Hindu from the Muslim. Tagore's life-long emphasis on the last two aspects of the problem of social disorganisation shows the political realism of his social vision. His solution of organisation was reconstruction, not reform. Young men and women would live in the countryside, know its problems, speak its own language, mix as one with the people, and by the infection of example, the revival of arts and crafts, ceremonies and festivals, and the establishment of Co-operative societies for credit, sanitation, and above all by education, would make the village re-function on a higher level. It was by the help of such ideas that he had managed his own estates. Sriniketan introduced science and modern organisation into his earlier scheme.

In a sense, Tagore's idea was that society was at the base of the state. But how actually the state developed out of social relations is not to be found in his writings. In the absence of clear views on that historical process, his world-society started with a congeries of individuals each of whom was trying to develop into a person. He would sometimes fill the gap between the person and the Civitas Dei by group-personality, national genius and destiny and so on, but it was only the language of litera-

ture. So the gap between the village-society and the world-society remained gaping. But he was sure that the latter would emerge out of the ruins of wars. His faith was flickering of late. Some kind of an idea of social autonomy was emerging out of his later writings. Dialectically, he was also tending to believe in the international society of the oppressed peoples. It is obvious that his 'peoples' were neither the 'masses' nor the 'classes.'

The basic assumptions of all these views are the following: (1) an abiding faith in harmony as a natural law, (2) State, government, society are only means to an end, which is the development of personality, (3) joint co-operative efforts are the keys to construction, and not begging and petition-mongering, and (4) sacrifice and service are the primary virtues of the man and the State. An outgrowth of the above is his dislike of power that absolutely corrupts every unit of the national being and totally prevents the necessary understanding between peoples. Tagore was one of the first thinkers to realise the menace of totalitarian 'statism' to peace and personality.

The limitations of these views can be easily stated. As mentioned in another connection, they are not possessed by the sense of history which interprets *and* guides. They are weak on the economic side. (Tagore and other members of the family had plunged into many economic ventures and made a mess of them. He was a practical man otherwise. But that kind of business-economics does not help the understanding of history). Tagore's notions are far too occupied with the person to be concerned with

a comprehension of the laws of capitalistic development and of the class-structure of society and the State. The analysis of power is in terms of money and machine without going into the fundamentals of State and property-relations. In short, Tagore's diagnosis was not that of a Socialist. We know how he dignified suffering by love, how he did not despise it as an abomination.

And yet, the general tenor of his views and criticisms was decidedly radical and progressive to the period. We say 'general,' because in the sixty or more years of his intensive intellectual life one could detect the presence of ideas which would act as a dead-weight to revolutionary changes. His ideas of *tapoban* or forest-laboratory, his romantic ruralism, his vision of the prince and the zamindar as the patriarch or the benevolent despot may appear nostalgic to-day. The subtler atmosphere of individualism may also be found oppressive. He had a horror of the party and believed that man was cribbed by partisanship. Some people may even feel that his ideal of the sacrificing woman, the releasing creature, the eternal inspirer, is anti-comradely, (The author suspects that in spite of the fact that in his novels and stories the women appear to be more progressive than the men, they are essentially only more interesting, the reason being that they do not observe the purdah and talk in Tagore's own language which is our ideal language.) In spite of all this and much more that the young Socialist may provide, Tagore was an agency for change. Mr. Amit Sen, in a brilliant article on the subject in the *Parichay* (Tagore Memorial Number), has pointed out the main features of Tagore's

progressivism. He mentions Tagore's great faith in *prana* and his humanism, but does not forget to show the deficiency in these conceptions. In the intimate association with every fateful change, Sen finds the secret of Tagore's radical views. At crises, fear envelops the soul of the interested; many succumb and few overcome it. Tagore was not afraid of change, and there are reasons to think that he would not have been afraid of basic upheavals. (*Vide* his third letter in *Letters from Russia—Why Afraid?*) Even if we leave the revolutionary changes that he effected in literature, music, dancing, and in other practical fields such as education, we are still left with his merciless attacks against organised religion. Tagore was getting more and more anti-religious, even secular in his later days. His opinions on our religious leaders, our pandits and maulanās, cannot be printed. Doping was only a mild term for their ministration.

Vanguard* writes of an incident in the Civil War in Spain. A Spanish soldier asked him, "What is Tagore's attitude towards Fascism?" The letter to Noguchi was referred to, and the soldier was happy. Said he: "He might not be coming from the ranks of the people, but he is sensitive and honest. He is on the side of progress and justice." After a pause the valiant fighter proceeded: "Many of them (the better type of intellectuals) might not take part in the actual fighting, many might abhor the violence that will show itself in the process, but they will at least be honest when, moved by the agonies of suffering humanity today, they will welcome the birth

* Calcutta Municipal Gazette Tagore Memorial Special Supplement, 1941.

of the new world of peace, freedom and happiness. By themselves they will not be able to build such a world, but they will welcome its construction when the toiling man will be enthroned. They are no doubt individuals and their reactions will be entirely emotional. Yet they will be our valuable allies in the struggle. Would you regard Tagore as one of them?" Vanguard did not hesitate to give him the proud answer: "Yes, we regard him so." Vanguard spoke for every serious student of Tagore. Tagore may have been this thing or that, but he had no fear in his make-up. Certainly not the fear of freedom to conquer which man has sought to merge himself in the whole, not even the fear of change to overcome which the intellectual has developed his subtleties, and the vested ones all the defence-mechanism discoverable by human ingenuity. Tagore always was on the right side of the struggle and his courage would not have failed at the zero hour. That's why he is progressive to the period, and also progressive in the long run. He had no fear of freedom.

No account of Tagore's social activities, however brief, can be complete without mentioning his educational views and experiments. The truant became one of our leading pedagogues. Those of us who have listened to his lectures and talks in the class at Shantiniketan must lament the loss to the teaching profession in the creative artist. But his educational experiments and his numerous writings on them are there for all to see and read, even if all cannot read his brilliant text-books for the children and the young. (His Bengali, English and Science primers were

all written from his own teaching experience.) But the Shantiniketan was his spiritual child. Started as the Brahmacharya Vidyalaya in December 1901 on the spot selected by the Maharshi, with the temple he had erected as the nucleus, and with only just a handful of boys, Tagore wanted to give effect to certain immediate and distant ends. In Prof. P. C. Mahalanabis' language, "Rabindranath's immediate object was to found a school where the children would live a happy life and have as much freedom as possible; where study would not be divorced from life; where the inmates would participate in the communal life; and live in harmony with the surroundings of nature." Among the deeper and more distant ideals were (1) the ancient ashrams of the *Upanishads* and the *tapoban* of Kalidasa—a classic setting, (2) knowledge of the countryside, including farming and care of cattle, (3) simple living, barefooted and vegetarian, and (4) self-help. Vedic hymns and ascetic life did not square ill with the contact with Nature. Music, drama and festivals were of course indispensable. Though many people called it a poetic caprice, Shantiniketan grew in numbers, thanks to his enormous sacrifice in time and money, his wife's whole-hearted devotion, and the enthusiasm of a number of devoted teachers, Jagadananda Roy, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, Animananda, Satis Roy and Mohit Sen. Meanwhile, the Swadeshi movement had taken the turn towards violence, and Tagore returned to Shantiniketan. Brahmabandhab left, but Ajit Kumar Chakravarty came in. From now on, Tagore took to re-construction of the villages round about the school.

There was a proposal to amalgamate the Shantiniketan with the National Council of Education towards the foundation of which he had materially assisted. But it fell through. Kshiti Mohan Shastri joined about 1908. When Tagore went to Europe in 1913 he felt the need of expanding the Shantiniketan into something bigger. C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson offered to come over, and they did. Their connection was life long. On December 22, 1918, Tagore first adumbrated before the students and the well-wishers his new idea of the Vishwa-bharati (Universal Culture) as the radiating centre of illumination for the world. The motto selected was *Yatra Visvam havati eka-nidam* (where the whole world forms its one single nest). Advanced studies in Buddhism, the Vedas, Pali, Prakrit were immediately taken up under the guidance of Pandits Bidhusekhar and Kshiti Mohan Shastri. Tibetan and Chinese were subsequently added. Tagore, in the mean time, was realising that the new institution should not only be economically self-sufficient but 'must group round it all the neighbouring villages, and vitally unite them with itself in all its economic endeavours.' L. M. Elmhirst came accordingly with his unbounded idealism and well-filled purse to start the Institute of Rural Reconstruction. This was the origin of the Sriniketan at Surul, a place nearby which Tagore had purchased some time ago from the family of Lord Sinha for the above purpose. During the non-co-operation days, Shantiniketan felt the blast, but Tagore said, "Our wealth is truly proved by our ability to give, and Vishwabharati is to prove this on behalf of India." In December 1921,

the Vishwabharati was formally founded with Sir Brajendra Nath Seal, that great savant and life-long friend of Tagore, as the Acharya. The concentration of different cultures of the East had been there, the new item in the programme being the idea 'to establish a living relationship between East and West, to promote international unity and understanding and fulfil the highest mission of the present age—the unification of mankind.' Since 1921, the Cheena Bhaban, the Hindi Bhavan, the Samgeet Bhaban, the departments of Islamic and Zoroastrian studies have been added to the older nucleus consisting of the existing school, the Sree Bhabana (for women), the Vidya-Bhabana (Research Department), and the famous Kala Bhabana over which Nandalal Bose so ably presides. Famous scholars like Sylvain Levi, Winternitz, Sten Konow, Formici, Tucci and Germanus have come as visiting professors. Many Indian scholars have also lectured there. Jawaharlal Nehru has truly said that he who has not visited Shantiniketan has not seen India, i.e., the best of India's culture.

Sree Krishna R. Kripalani has given in the *Viswabharati Quarterly*, Vishwabharati Birthday Number (1941), an admirable summary of Tagore's educational ideals, and the reader is requested to turn there for further enlightenment. The author can only give his own estimate. The strength of the Vishwabharati scheme of education, which is a concretisation of Tagore's ideals, consists in (1) the use of the vernacular as the medium of knowledge, (2) its emphasis on the wholeness of culture, through contact with nature, through music, painting, dancing,

dramas, festivals and fairs, in other words, through rituals spontaneously organised, (3) its heightening of the awareness of young minds to beauty, and (4) the affirmation of the highest goal of human endeavour *viz.*, the unity of mankind. These are noble ideals indeed, and the gratitude of India to one of her greatest men will be tested by her willingness to keep them alive and make them grow, through storms and stresses, through the changing attitudes of her people in the context of world-events.

VIII

TAGORE'S INFLUENCE

'IS the Universe concluded that we should come to a conclusion?' asked Henry James of his audience, and there was no answer. To-day's public are more anxious. But the author confesses his incompetence to satisfy the public if any such question about Tagore's abiding values be raised. In addition, the author is not sure about the universality of any value inasmuch as he seeks to understand all values in the perspective of historical stages. And then, Tagore is so big, his life's work so prolonged, his influence so all-pervasive that he cannot be put into a formula. It would also be testing him by his own standards, his own attitudes. Surely, if men and women in Bengal talk his language, write his hand, sing his songs, feel his feelings and moods, participate in his rituals, any conclusion about Tagore by a Bengali becomes not only difficult but unfair. All that can be done therefore is to mention once more the tests of greatness, *viz.*, largeness, profundity, and the capacity to draw nearer to and from the laws of organic, social human nature, and to reiterate that Tagore satisfied these tests. His works are an organic

whole, they are of bewildering variety and maintain a high level, and their crises are generally marked by going down to the common reservoir of collective living and coming out with a fresh lease. Technically also, we find the same process. His artistic achievements are a synopsis, a recapitulation of Art's own history, but on a higher level.

We have noted what we have considered to be the instances of his deficiencies. Though he repeated the historical process within himself, his sense of history was a panoramic vision, a subjective estimate. Between the individual and the Supreme Person or the Universe, institutions, groups, or nations did not very much obtrude. Tagore's axis was personality. How exactly it was being turned askew he did not enquire. He put it to machine, power, standardisation, but not to property-relations. He appreciated science and scientific outlook, but never told us why they were not spreading, why they were being quashed by sentiments. He saw the usefulness of machinery and wanted it to remain man's slave; and yet he did not fully grasp the position in regard to its ownership and the consequential surplus and resulting denial of personality to the person. To the generation that has witnessed the crisis of civilization in the fierce clarity of its exaggeration these deficiencies are positive. But are they not the mirror of the confused ways of social change in India? These contradictions are not accidental; nor are they personal.

So the modern young man rebels only against the manner in which the social changes have taken place in India when he protests against the immediate influence of Tagore on Indians. On other counts, it is an influence for

which he was no more consciously responsible than the mighty *banian* for the fungi underneath. His stress on the spontaneity of creative impulse created a litter of untutored geniuses ; his lyrics canalised Bengali literature mainly into one channel ; his abundant use in prose of metaphors, analogies, and similes stood in the way of the logical, argumentative prose of statement ; his music and dance led to an epidemic of musicians who did not know the difference between Bhairabi and Asawari, and of dancers who were deaf to rhythm. Both types covered their ignorance by silly talks on 'expression.' The author knows what he thought of them. But then, he was good, too good to aspirants.

That is only one side of the picture. On the other side, Tagore's influence was a release in every sense and in every sphere of art. After him, it is impossible to write bad verse and ineffective prose in Bengal. The general standard is almost invariably competent. Prosodic experiments have been numerous in recent Bengali poetry, and all of them can be traced to him. The contents of stories and novels are different to-day, but the matrices do not yet mark a violent departure. Musical composition, as a separate activity, although it is a rehash of Tagore, has come to stay. His paintings have not been imitated, but his dance-forms have been. In politics, his influence acts against that of Gandhiji, which is very strange indeed knowing what Dhananjaya had preached. Rightly or wrongly, the average educated Bengali does not detect aesthetic feeling in the charka, in asceticism, in non-cooperation, or in any scheme of civil-disobedience.

Probably, the land-settlement, the mother-cult and the social composition of Bengal have something to do with it. But that's another story. On the other hand, if to-day, there is no writer in India who is not a humanist and an internationalist in outlook (a very strange phenomenon indeed when we compare it with the literature of other subject-peoples), the credit should go primarily to Tagore. Tagore's influence on women has been elevating, but not very deep, at least less deep than Sarat Chandra Chatterji's. It is not easy to conform to the ideals of Tagore's heroines. Indian women seem to feel that they can come up to such ideals only when they are watered down, as they were by Sarat Chandra. If the course of woman's education in middle-class families be straight from the second primer to Chatterji and Tagore, the influence is bound to be uplifting. Still, women in Bengal fill their private letters with (unacknowledged) quotations from Tagore's poems and songs. At critical moments in a maiden's or a wife's career one or two attitudes of Tagore's heroines have been known to have played their part. They remained at home, developing their personalities, and releasing their males. Such noble instances, however, are unfortunately rare.

Today, the global war is on. Man is diminished in Tagore's country. In Chungking, in Stalingrad, Leningrad, Moscow, Coventry and in London, man has risen to his stature. Dark agencies are also mustering their forces against change. On the other hand, mighty groundswells are surging. The issues are clearer than ever. We Indians know on which side he would have thrown his

